

A Companion to Clare of Assisi

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VOLUME 21

A Companion to Clare of Assisi

Life, Writings, and Spirituality

By

Joan Mueller



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On the cover: Tavola of Clare (Courtesy of Tau-AV Produktion, photo by Bruno Föh).
A thirteenth-century iconic altarpiece depicting eight scenes from the life of Clare.

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To Mother Mary Regina, PCC
With Gratitude

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ABBREVIATIONS

CLARE AND AGNES SOURCES

<i>1LAg</i>	<i>Clare's First Letter to Agnes of Prague</i>
<i>2LAg</i>	<i>Clare's Second Letter to Agnes of Prague</i>
<i>3LAg</i>	<i>Clare's Third Letter to Agnes of Prague</i>
<i>4LAg</i>	<i>Clare's Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague</i>
<i>FLUG</i>	<i>Gregory IX's Form of Life</i>
<i>FLInn</i>	<i>Innocent IV's Form of Life</i>
<i>FLCl</i>	<i>Clare's Form of Life</i>
<i>LegCl</i>	<i>The Legend of Clare of Assisi</i>
<i>LegAg</i>	<i>The Legend of Agnes of Prague</i>
<i>Process</i>	<i>Acts of the Process of Canonization of Clare</i>

FRANCIS SOURCES

<i>1C</i>	<i>The Life of Francis by Thomas of Celano</i>
<i>2C</i>	<i>The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul</i>
<i>1LtF</i>	<i>The First Letter to the Faithful</i>
<i>2LtF</i>	<i>The Second Letter to the Faithful</i>
<i>AC</i>	<i>The Assisi Compilation</i>
<i>ChrJG</i>	<i>The Chronicle of Jordan of Giano</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>The 1221 Rule of the Friars Minor (Regula non bullata)</i>
<i>LR</i>	<i>The 1223 Rule of the Friars Minor (Regula bullata)</i>
<i>L3C</i>	<i>The Legend of the Three Companions</i>
<i>ScEx</i>	<i>The Sacred Exchange between Francis and Lady Poverty</i>
<i>Testament</i>	<i>The Testament of S. Francis</i>

STANDARD WORKS AND PERIODICALS

<i>AF</i>	<i>Analecta Franciscana</i>
<i>AFH</i>	<i>Archivum Franciscanum Historicum</i>
<i>AASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
<i>BF</i>	<i>Bullarium Franciscanum</i>
<i>CDB</i>	<i>Codex Diplomaticus et Epistolaris Regni Bohemiae</i>

CF	<i>Collectanea Franciscana</i>
FF	<i>Fontes Franciscani</i>
FranzStud	<i>Franziskanische Studien</i>
FRB	<i>Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum</i>
FS	<i>Franciscan Studies</i>
Latham	<i>Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources</i> (London 1965)
LTK	<i>Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche</i>
MF	<i>Miscellanea Francescana</i>
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae historica</i>
MGH SS	<i>Monumenta Germaniae historica, Scriptores</i>
Niermeyer	<i>Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus</i>
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
SF	C. D. Lanham, <i>"Salutatio" Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200: Syntax, Style, and Theory</i> (Munich 1975)
Souter	A. Souter, <i>A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.</i> (Oxford 1949)
ST	<i>Studi e Testi</i>

Scripture abbreviations in Latin texts referring to books of the Vulgate Bible are taken from *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. R. Gryson *et al.*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart 1994).

INTRODUCTION

The life of Clare of Assisi and her monastery of sisters at S. Damiano in Assisi is pivotal to the history of the Franciscan movement. Clare accompanied Francis from the beginning of his ministry and survived him by more than twenty-five years. During this time, she persisted in the face of a deposition of a minister general who she greatly respected, tightening canonical legislation not always sympathetic to her wishes to follow the Poor Christ, and creeping clericalism within the Franciscan Order. All these challenges Clare faced with joy and courage, determined to follow the path that Francis had taught her.

Building on the contribution of archival and paleographical work done by dedicated friars in the early twentieth century, the bulk of today's study of Clare is done by medievalists all over the world and in a variety of settings. In the later third of the twentieth century, collections and translations of the Clare corpus built upon and continued the archival work.¹ Refining the broad strokes of Herbert Grundmann, who situated Franciscan women within the context of the twelfth and thirteenth century "women's movement,"² contemporary Clare scholars focus their attention on the "women's movement" on the late

¹ Ignacio Omaechevarria, ed., *Escritos de Santa Clara y documentos contemporáneos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 1970; 1982); Engelbert Grau, ed., *Leben und Schriften der hl. Klara* (Werl/Westf. D.-Coelde-Verlag, 1953); Giovanni Boccali, ed., *Opuscula S. Francisci et scripta S. Clarae Assisiensium* (Assisi: Edizione Porziuncola, 1978); Marie-France Becker, Jean-François Godet and Thaddée Matura, eds., *Claire d'Assise: Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985); Regis Armstrong, trans., *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York: New City Press, 2006).

² On the thirteenth-century women's movement see Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter: Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und der religiösen Frauenbewegung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert, und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961), in English as *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Jacques Leclercq, "Il monachesimo femminile nei secoli XII e XIII," in *Movimento religioso femminile e francescanesimo nel secolo XIII*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, 61–99 (Assisi: Società internazionale di studi francescani, 1980); Edith Pasztor, *Donne e santità: Studi sulla religiosità femminile nel medio evo* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 2000); Brenda Bolton, "Mulieres Sanctae," in *Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World*, ed. Derek Baker, 77–95 (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1973).

medieval Italian peninsula³ as well as other Italian manifestations of medieval, feminine piety.⁴

More specific studies on Clare's life and writings have followed, most recently a monumental multivolume work on Clare's *forma vitae* by the Federazione S. Chiara di Assisi.⁵ Marco Bartoli's bibliographic study of Clare remains a critical text.⁶ Building on the work of Livarius Oliger⁷ and Lilly Zarncke,⁸ Maria Pia Alberzoni has specialized in writing the legislative history of Clare's monastery in relationship to the thirteenth-century papacy.⁹ My own work has been a literary study of

³ Among many possible studies, see for example, Marco Bartoli, "La povertà e il movimento francescano femminile," in *Dalla 'sequela Christi' di Francesco d'Assisi all'apologia della povertà*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 223–48 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1992); Robert Brentano, "Il movimento religioso femminile a Rieti nei secoli XIII–XIV," in *Il movimento religioso femminile in Umbria dei secoli XIII–XIV*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, 67–83 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1991); Giovanna Casagrande "Forme di vita religiosa femminile nell'area di Città di Castello nel secolo XIII," in *Il movimento religioso femminile in Umbria dei secoli XIII–XIV*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, 123–57 (Perugia: Regione dell'Umbria, 1984); Peter Höhler, "Il monastero delle Clarisse di Montelupe in Perugia (1218–1400)," in *Il movimento religioso femminile in Umbria dei secoli XIII–XIV*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, 159–82 (Perugia: Regione dell'Umbria, 1984); and Daniel Bornstein, "Women and Religion in Late Medieval Italy: History and Historiography," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, 1–27 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴ Anna Benvenuti Papi, *In castro poenitentiae: Santità e società femminile nell'Italia medievale* (Rome: Herder, 1990); Mario Sensi, *Storie di bizzocche tra Umbria e Marche* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1995); Mario Sensi, "Incarcerate e reclusi in Umbria nei secoli XIII e XIV: Un bizzocaggio centro-italiano," in *Il movimento religioso femminile in Umbria dei secoli XIII–XIV*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, 85–121 (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1984).

⁵ *Chiara di Assisi e le sue fonti legislative: Sinossi cromatica* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2003); *Chiara di Assisi: Una vita prende forma: Iter storico* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2005); and *Il Vangelo come forma di vita: In ascolto di Chiara nella sua Regola*. (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2007).

⁶ *Chiara d'Assisi* (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1989).

⁷ "De origine regularum ordinis S. Clarae," *AFH* 5 (1912): 181–209; 413–47.

⁸ *Der Anteil des Kardinals Ugolino an der Ausbildung der drei Orden des Heiligen Franz* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1972, [1930]).

⁹ *Chiara e il papato* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Franciscana, 1995); *La nascita di un'istituzione: L'ordine di S. Damiano nel XIII secolo* (Milan: Edizioni CUSL, 1996); "Nequaquam a Christi sequela in perpetuum absolvi desidero: Chiara tra carisma e istituzione," in *Chiara d'Assisi e la memoria de Francesco*, ed. Alfonso Marini and Maria Beatrice Mistretta, 41–65 (Città di Castello: Petrucci, 1995); "San Damiano nel 1228: Contributo alla questione clariana," *CF* 67 (1997): 459–76; "Curia romana e regolamentazione delle Damianite e delle Domenicane," in *Regulae, consuetudines, statuta: Studi sulle fonti normative degli ordini religiosi nei secoli centrali del medioevo*, ed. Cristina Andenna and Gert Melville, 501–37 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005); *Clare of*

Clare's letters,¹⁰ while Jaroslav Polc,¹¹ Alfonso Marini,¹² and Christian-Frederik Felskau's¹³ studies have focused on Clare's dialogue partner, Agnes of Prague. Other scholars such as Sean Field,¹⁴ Lezlie Knox,¹⁵ and Jeryldene Wood¹⁶ are moving the research further into the years after Clare's death. Although there is currently a flurry of scholarly work, much of which is presently in process or in press, regarding lay-women who were more or less associated with the Franciscan friars, this broader 13th century Franciscan "women's movement" is not the focus of this volume and deserves to be studied in its own right.

It is the hope of this volume to dialogue with the hundreds of articles and books in the field in order to present the current state of studies concerning Clare of Assisi. While the chapters of this text progressively deal with differing aspects of the Clare story, each chapter is written to stand by itself.

The book is organized into three parts. Part I, chapters 1–4, deals with Clare as a Franciscan woman and describes her early life, conversion, manner of living within the S. Damiano monastery, her struggle to obtain the "privilege of poverty," and her unique contribution to the history of monasticism. Part II, chapters 5–7, examines Clare's writings, in particular her four letters to Agnes of Prague, her literary

Assisi and the Poor Sisters in the Thirteenth Century, ed. Jean-François Godet-Calogeras (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 2004).

¹⁰ Joan Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001); *Clare of Assisi: The Letters to Agnes* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), and "Clare of Assisi and the Agnes Legend: A Franciscan Citing of St. Agnes of Rome as *Mulier Sancta*," *Studies in Spirituality* 8 (1998): 141–61.

¹¹ Jaroslav Polc, *Agnes von Böhmen 1211–1282: Königstochter—Äbtissin—Heilige* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1989).

¹² *Agnese di Boemia* (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1991); "*Pauperem Christum, virgo pauper, amplectere*: Il punto su Chiara ed Agnese di Boemia," in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 121–32 (Galatina: Congedo, 1998).

¹³ *Agnes von Böhmen und die Klosteranlage der Klarissen und Franziskaner in Prag: Leben und Institution, Legende und Verehrung* (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2008); and "*Hoc est quod cupio*: Approaching the Religious Goals of Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Bohemia, and Isabelle of France," *Magistra* 12 (2006): 3–28.

¹⁴ *Isabelle of France: Capetian Sanctity and Franciscan Identity in the Thirteenth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

¹⁵ *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); and "One and the Same Spirit: Clare of Assisi's *Form of Life* in the Later Middle Ages," *FS* 64 (2006): 235–54.

¹⁶ *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

use of the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* in these letters, and her *forma vitae*. Part III consists of Clare's writings, in particular her letters to Agnes of Prague and her *forma vitae*, in translation.

Chapter one begins with a description of the context of Clare's Franciscan choice as a woman of the thirteenth-century Italian peninsula. It continues with a description of the sources for Clare's life and writings, and proposes a methodology. The text then utilizes this methodology to document Clare's early life, including her life before meeting Francis, her conversations with Francis, her conversion and tonsure at S. Maria degli Angeli, her subsequent stay at S. Paolo delle Abbadesse and S. Angelo di Panzo, and the conversion of her blood sister Catherine, who Francis later renamed Agnes.

Using the witness of the S. Damiano sisters in Clare's canonization process and pertinent material from the *Legend of Clare*, chapter two describes daily life within the S. Damiano monastery during Clare's tenure as abbess. Its goal is to organize the above source material around themes that permit the reader to imagine the life of Clare and her sisters. Before one can say anything about Clare's prayer, her presence among her sisters, her dedication to the "privilege of poverty," or her relationship with her Franciscan brothers, this organization of source material is necessary.

The third chapter studies the charismatic context of Clare's "privilege of poverty" vis-à-vis the legislative goals of the thirteenth-century papacy. It uses the jargonized reference to "infants' milk" to trace Clare's struggle to keep her cherished "privilege," while introducing the contribution of Agnes of Prague in this struggle. The medieval politics that complicated Clare's Franciscan existence are still being mined by contemporary scholars, and studies on this topic continue to proliferate and expand current understanding of Clare.

Chapter four represents a type of study that is both old and in its infancy. Old, in that searching monastic and communal archives for manuscripts concerning Ugolinian nuns has a long and complex history; new, because making sense of and organizing these local documents is still very much a work in progress. To this end, four Ugolinian monasteries are presented in this chapter that either did not persevere in the "privilege of poverty" or never requested it. It is intended that such an examination will provide readers with a foil that reflects what Clare was refusing in her struggle with the papacy.

While chapters one through four deal with aspects of Clare's life and milieu, Part II of the text, chapters five through seven, concerns her written legacy. Chapter five contains historical background and commentary on Clare's four letters to Agnes of Prague. These letters are not merely spiritual letters, but historical letters. Reading them in historical context gives the reader a sense of what Clare is referring to as well as a clearer sense of her spirituality.

Chapter six concerns a critical text found within Clare's letters, the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome*. Writing to Agnes of Prague, who she had never and would never meet, Clare needed a logical connection. The *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* was known by women throughout the medieval world, often in the vernacular. It surely would be familiar to one whose name was Agnes. Because Clare used this text brilliantly throughout her letters, not appreciating her savvy in improvising on this text would make for an uncontextualized reading. This chapter, therefore, presents points of contact between Clare's text and the Roman *Legend*. It is followed by an English translation of the entire *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* by my colleague Julia Fleming, Ph.D., so that readers might study the relationships found within the various texts.

Chapter seven is a chapter-by-chapter commentary on Clare's *forma vitae*. It includes documentation regarding secondary literature that discusses various topics found within Clare's *forma vitae*, as well as references to Clare's dependence on other legislative texts and Franciscan hagiographical literature.

Part III consists of my translations of Clare's four letters to Agnes of Prague as well my translation of Clare's *forma vitae* so that the reader can easily refer to these translations while working through the various chapter commentaries. Notes for these translations are found within the commentaries of chapters five-seven.

Many colleagues were involved in the research and writing of this manuscript. As one can tell by the footnotes, scholarly work on Clare of Assisi is a fruitful field and I am indebted to authors in English, Italian, French, German, Czech, Spanish, and Catalan for their insights. Helpful for the resolution of various language issues were Dr. Andreas Gommermann, Dr. Frank Mantello, Yvonne Reher, Dolorosa Krem-lacek, ND, Suzanne Noffke, OP, Ludmila Pospíšilová, OSF, Richard McGloin, S.J., Dr. Thomas Coffey, Dr. Geoffrey Bakewell, Reginald Foster, OCD, Dr. Maria Teresa Vanderboegh, Dr. Jean François

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PART I

CLARE: FRANCISCAN WOMEN

CHAPTER ONE

THE FRANCISCAN CHOICE

Clare of Assisi was born in 1193/94 to Favarone di Offreduccio di Bernardino and his wife Ortolana.¹ Her family, both maternal and paternal, was from Assisi's noble class.² The family palazzo was strategically located next to the Church of S. Rufino and joined other noble palazzos in an aristocratic ring surrounding the S. Rufino square in Assisi. Her father was a knight³ and the Offreduccio family was one of about twenty noble families in the Assisi commune. Besides their town residences, these families owned country castles and land that provided them with revenue and resources.⁴

Even today Assisi is a town stratified economically. Clinging to the slopes of Mount Subasio, the upper reaches of Assisi hold the houses of the wealthiest citizens, the middle, its shops and merchants, and the lower regions, although this is less predictable today, Assisi's more vulnerable citizens. In the thirteenth century, the nobles lived on the upper regions near S. Rufino, while the merchant families—including the family of S. Francis—lived in the strata below S. Rufino near the Roman Temple of Minerva in the town square. The poor and outcast often lived outside the walls in the malarial swamps of the valley.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, the economic predictability of the old feudal order was being challenged. Armed with the riches earned from trade with northern Europe and the east, merchants were becoming wealthy often on the backs of noble landlords who were forced to borrow in order to secure their holdings and aristocratic lifestyles. As this aristocratic security became more and more expensive, and as local tastes drifted from local products to more exotic goods, the stability of noble families became increasingly precarious. Old familial alliances competed with craft guilds and international trade

¹ *Process* 1:4; 16:1.

² *Process* 1:4; 3:31; 4:17; 16:1; 18:4; 20:2.

³ *Process* 1:4.

⁴ On Clare's family and its landholdings see Arnaldo Fortini, "Nuove notizie intorno a S. Chiara di Assisi," *AfH* 46 (1953): 3–43. See also Gemma Fortini, "The Noble Family of St. Clare of Assisi," *FS* 42 (1982): 48–67.

associations. The chivalric traditions associated with the old ways were progressively undermined, even as the rules for the new merchant lifestyle were evolving. The authority of the aristocracy became difficult to sustain as these lords owed money to those whose class should have demanded allegiance rather than indebtedness.⁵

The challenges posed to the old order by conflicts between the landed *maiores* and the new merchant *minores* were further complicated by the struggle for power between the papacy and the German emperor. When Pope Innocent III took the papal throne on January 8, 1198, he determined to secure the Duchy of Spoleto. In April of 1198, the German overlord, Conrad of Urslingen, left Assisi and went to Narni to consign the duchy to the papal legates. Aware that Rome would not be able to control the populace as Conrad and his German soldiers had done, and not inclined to provide the papacy the opportunity to challenge their self-governance, the citizens of Assisi razed the Rocca, appointed their own magistrates, and turned their indignation against the local nobility.⁶

Clare's family, as well as the other aristocratic families encircling the Church of S. Rufino, ran for their lives as common citizens burned and ransacked their ancestral homes. It is possible that Francis himself, being a merchant's son whose livelihood benefited from newfound commune freedoms, participated both in the razing of the Rocca and perhaps even the destruction of Clare's home. Nobles fleeing to their country estates would not find safety even there from the power-hungry mob. The castles of Sassorosso, Matteo, Poggio S. Damiano and S. Savino were devastated by the ambitions of the new commune.⁷

⁵ Attilio Bartoli-Langeli, "La realtà sociale Assisiana e il patto del 1210," in *Assisi al tempo di S. Francesco*, 271–336 (Assisi: Società internazionale di studi francescani, 1978); Paul Riley, "Francis' Assisi: Its Political and Social History, 1175–1225," *FS* 34 (1974): 393–424; Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁶ *Gesta Innocenti III* (PL 214), xxii. For an English translation see *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III by an Anonymous Author*, trans. James M. Powell (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 10–12. See also Raoul Manselli, "Assisi tra impero e papato," in *Assisi al tempo di S. Francesco*, 339–57 (Assisi: Società internazionale di studi francescani, 1978); Daniel Waley, *The Papal State in the Thirteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1951), 30–37; and John Moore, *Pope Innocent III (1160/61–1216): To Root Up and To Plant* (Brill: Leiden, 2003), 33–35.

⁷ Francesco Santucci, "Castelli assisiani nella prima metà del Duecento," in *Assisi al tempo di Federico II*, ed. Francesco Santucci, 31–43 (Assisi: Academia Properziana del Subasio, 1995).

The aristocrats settled in the neighboring commune of Perugia where they joined their relatives in fighting against the arrogance of the upstart Assisians. As Clare was beginning her fifth year, she most probably found herself a refugee living in Perugia with other noble Assisi families. The knights of these families joined together with the Perugian nobility in fighting against the Assisians until a truce allowed the Offreduccio family to return. In the compromise, the Assisi commune made peace with its former lords by restoring their properties and paying restitution.⁸

This violence deeply affected the youth of Assisi. Francis, the merchant, would be captured in a skirmish with Perugia and imprisoned for a year before returning to Assisi physically and psychologically broken. Gradually dissociating himself from the greed of his merchant father, Francis flirted first with knighthood and then rejected both the merchant's life and the noble life in favor of God. The young Clare, also, was caught in the struggle between old and new. For those who were coming of age in Assisi, the dichotomy between choices was so radical that violence on one side or the other seemed the only option. In this milieu, Clare, the noble daughter, and Francis, the merchant's son, forged an alternative path.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Scholars are still struggling to define a methodology that is appropriate to the study of Clare.⁹ Where to begin and how to weight the evidence regarding Clare is, of course, essential to reconstructing Clare's history as well as her life and spirit. Although there are many historical sources for the study of Clare, not all are of equal value. One might organize the significant data useful for the historical study of the life of Clare of Assisi into four categories. Although the categorization of historical data will always be artificial and even fluid depending upon the project, an attempt at a hierarchical categorization will at least keep

⁸ Attilio Bartoli-Langeli, "La realtà sociale assisiana e il patto del 1210," 284–336.

⁹ Marco Bartoli, "La vie de Claire d'Assise: Nouvelles perspectives historiques," in *Claire d'Assise: Féminité et spiritualité*, ed. Jean Marc Charron, 11–26 (Beauport, Québec: MNH, 1998); Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, "Clara Claris Praeclara: A proposito dei nuovi studi su Chiara d'Assisi," *CF* 75 (2005): 593–617.

one mindful of the relative importance of the various data available. Given these caveats, I offer this proposal.

First, of the writings attributed to Clare, only her four letters to Agnes of Prague¹⁰ and her *forma vitae* have lacked controversy regarding their authenticity.¹¹ The letters to Agnes of Prague contain intimate knowledge of the struggles of the monasteries of Prague and Assisi and express the concerns and decisions of early Franciscan women forced to contend with juridical issues.¹² Clare's *forma vitae*, of course, is an amalgamation of many documents,¹³ but there is no doubt that Clare and her sisters were very much a part of the writing process. The autobiographical nature of the sixth chapter of the *forma vitae* is certainly the voice of Clare herself. Although the authenticity of the Blessing¹⁴ and the Testament of Clare¹⁵ has been questioned, these writings con-

¹⁰ Concerning the manuscript evidence for these letters see Marie-France Becker, Jean-François Godet, and Thaddée Matura, eds., *Claire d'Assise: Écrits* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 16–18; Achille Ratti, "Un codice pragenese a Milano con testo inedito della vita di S. Agnese di Praga," *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere* (1896): 392–96; and Joan Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001), 1–4.

¹¹ I'm referring to the writings of Clare in the broad sense, meaning that the work was done under the direction and according to the ideas of Clare and the sisters of S. Damiano. This is not to negate the possible presence of a secretary—one of the sisters or perhaps a Franciscan brother—who did the actual writing. Clare's passion and understanding of issues, especially those concerning the "privilege of poverty," are evident in the letters and the *forma vitae*, and her expression is feminine and lacks clerical idiom. Even today, if a writer uses a secretary for correspondence, credit for authorship is given to the one composing the correspondence, not the secretary. This is true even if the secretary cleans up the prose and incorporates standard protocols. On the question of a possible secretary, see Timothy Johnson, "Clare, Leo, and the Authorship of the Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague," *FS* 62 (2004): 91–100.

¹² Joan Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001), 207–49.

¹³ For an outline of these various documents and their final appropriation into the *forma vitae* of Clare, see Federazione S. Chiara di Assisi delle Clarisse di Umbria-Sardegna, *Chiara di Assisi e le sue fonti legislative: Sinossi cromatica* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2003).

¹⁴ Concerning the manuscript tradition of this text see Becker, Godet, and Matura in *Claire d'Assise*, 27–28. See also Walter Seton, "Some New Sources for the Life of Blessed Agnes of Prague," *AFH* 7 (1914): 185–97; Walter Seton, "The Oldest Text of the Benediction of Saint Clare of Assisi," *Revue d'Histoire Franciscaine* 2 (1925): 88–90; C. M. Borkowski, "A Second Middle High German Translation of the Benediction of Saint Clare," *FS* 36 (1976): 99–104; Ubald d'Alençon, "Le plus ancien texte de la benediction, du privilège de la pauvreté et du testament de sainte Claire d'Assisi," *Revue d'Histoire Franciscaine* 1 (1924): 469–82; Diego Ciccarelli, "Contributi alla recensione degli scritti di S. Chiara," *MF* 79 (1979): 362–64.

¹⁵ See Werner Maleczek, "Das *Privilegium Paupertatis* Innocenz' III.' und das Testament der Klara von Assisi," *CF* 65 (1995): 5–82—who questions the authenticity of the *Testament*. Defending its authenticity is Niklaus Kuster, "Das Armutsprivileg

tinue to be included in scholarly anthologies. Questions concerning Clare's *Testament* are particularly problematic as they create critical difficulties regarding various chapters in Clare's life.¹⁶ The authenticity of the letter to Ermentrude of Bruges is widely regarded as highly questionable.¹⁷

The second category of sources for the life of Clare includes legal documents: Clare's canonization process,¹⁸ a plethora of canonical letters sent to S. Damiano and other Ugolinian monasteries,¹⁹ and archival documents.²⁰ Clare's process of canonization consists of eyewitness testimony given under oath concerning the life of Clare.²¹ Ecclesial

Innozenz' III. und Klaras Testament: Echt oder Raffinierte Fälschungen?," *CF* 66 (1996): 5–95. See also Chiara Augusta Lainati, "Il testamento di Santa Chiara," *Forma Sororum* 23 (1986): 196–220; Becker, Godet, and Matura in *Claire d'Assise*, 21–27; and Leonard Lehmann, "La questione del testamento di S. Chiara," in *Clara Claris Praeclara: L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte*, 257–305 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004).

¹⁶ See Maria Pia Alberzoni's summary of the Maleczek argument and subsequent review of Clare's early history in "San Damiano nel 1228: Contributo alla questione clariana," *CF* 67 (1997): 459–76.

¹⁷ Luke Wadding claimed that Clare wrote two letters to Ermentrude of Bruges, but only presents one text, see *Annales Minorum*, vol. 4 (Florence: Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi], 1931), 90–91. Subsequent scholars have doubted the authenticity of the letter. In *Claire d'Assise*, Becker, Godet, and Matura place the Ermentrude letter in the appendix of their text.

¹⁸ Zefferino Lazzeri, "Il processo di canonizzazione di Santa Chiara d'Assisi," *AFH* 13 (1920): 434–35; Giovanni Boccali, *Santa Chiara d'Assisi sotto processo: Lettura storico-teologica degli atti di canonizzazione* (S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi: Porziuncola, 2003); Fernando Uribe, *Introduzione alle fonti agiografiche di san Francesco e santa Chiara d'Assisi [sec. XIII–XIV]* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2002), 470–82. Clare's canonization process has come down to us not in Latin but in Umbrian. This Umbrian text is found in Enrico Menestò and Stefano Brufani, eds., *Fontes Franciscani* (S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995): 2455–507. It was first published in English in Nesta de Robeck, *St. Clare of Assisi* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1951), 179–230.

¹⁹ See a partial index of these sources in Mary Francis Hone, *St. Clare of Assisi and Her Order: A Bibliographic Guide* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1995).

²⁰ For archival documents concerning Assisi at the time of Clare see Arnaldo Forini, *Nova vita di S. Francesco*, vol. III (Assisi: Porziuncola, 1959).

²¹ On the process of canonization and the role of sainthood during the Middle Ages see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); André Vauchez, "Between Virginity and Spiritual Espousals: Models of Feminine Sainthood in the Christian West during the Middle Ages," *Medieval History Journal* 2 (1999): 349–59; Marco Bartoli, "Chiara e le altre: Il ruolo pubblico delle donne santé nell'Italia del XIII secolo," in *Clara Claris Praeclara: L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte*, 404–17 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004); Giulia Barone, "Ideali di santità fra XII e XIII secolo," in *Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 33–55 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993); Michael Goodich, "The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography," *Church History* 50 (1981): 20–32.

and civil epistolary documentation detailing Clare's struggle for the "privilege of poverty" have until recently not been given sufficient weight by scholars attempting to reconstruct the life and spirit of Clare. The pioneering work of Maria Pia Alberzoni began to address this lacuna.²² While interpreting legislative documents demands an understanding of the history and development of canonical formulation and the papal agenda for the Ugolinian *ordo*, consideration of these canonical texts is critical to understanding Clare's context. Finally, archival work done by local historians brings to light evidence regarding Clare's family, her acquaintances, and monastic business dealings. These invaluable legal sources are for the most part dated, and provide first-hand evidence of the life of Clare, her family, and the business of many of the women's monasteries that the papacy attempted to associate with Clare.

The third category, hagiographical sources, includes works based on Clare's canonization process such as the *Legend of Clare*,²³ the *Versified Legend*, the papal decree of canonization,²⁴ or references to Clare within the context of male, Franciscan hagiography.²⁵ Scholar-

²² See, for example, *Chiara e il papato* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1995); "Chiara di Assisi e il francescanesimo femminile," in *Francesco d'Assisi e il primo secolo di storia franciscana*, 203–35 (Turin: Einaudi, 1997); "Papato e nuovi Ordini religiosi femminili," in *Il papato duecentesco e gli ordini mendicanti*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 205–61 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1998).

²³ Concerning the *Legend of Clare* see Giovanni Boccali, "Tradizione manoscritta delle leggende di Santa Chiara di Assisi," in *Clara Claris Praeclara: L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte*, 419–500 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004).

²⁴ Fernando Uribe, *Introduzione alle fonti agiografiche di san Francesco e santa Chiara d'Assisi [sec. XIII–XIV]* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2002), 482–511. See also, Emanuela Prinzivalli, "Le fonti agiografiche come documenti per la vita di Chiara," in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 145–64 (Galatina: Congedo, 1998); Stefano Brufani, "Le *legendae* agiografiche di Chiara d'Assisi del secolo XIII," in *Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 325–55 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993).

²⁵ Pierre Brunette, "Claire et François d'Assise: Leur relation d'après les sources," in *Claire d'Assise: Féminité et spiritualité*, ed. Jean Marc Charron, 65–108 (Beauport, Québec: MNH, 1998); Margaret Carney, "Francis and Clare: A Critical Examination of the Sources," *Laurentianum* 30 (1987): 25–60; Felice Accrocca, "Chiara e l'ordine francescano," in *Clara Claris Praeclara: L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte*, 340–79 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004); Jacques Dalarun, "Donna e Donna: Femminile e femminizzazione negli scritti e le leggende di Francesco d'Assisi," in *Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 237–67 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993); Jacques Dalarun, "Chiara e gli uomini," in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 79–120 (Galatina: Congedo, 1998); Marco Bartoli, "Il movimento francescano delle origini e la donna," *Studi Francescani* 88 (1991): 378–91.

ship on the “Franciscan question” has demonstrated the necessity of reading these male hagiographical texts with caution as they interpret Clare within the controversial polemics of the clericalization of the Friars Minor.²⁶ Usually, the more dependable eyewitness and legal documents are preferred to the more problematic hagiographical sources, but hagiographical sources are, for certain chapters and details of Clare’s life, what is available. Of the hagiographical sources, the *Legend of Clare* is particularly valuable, although still fraught with interpretive difficulties.

The fourth category, historical, archeological, and artistic sources, adds details concerning Clare’s context and spirituality. Critical to this category are various histories of surrounding personages such as Innocent III, Saladin, Frederick II, Elias of Cortona, and others. Archeological and artistic works must also be considered when attempting a thorough study.

To summarize, the following historical sources are helpful to the study of Clare of Assisi:

Sources for the Life of Clare			
Clare’s Writings	Legal Documents	Hagiography	Other Sources
• Four letters to Agnes of Prague • <i>Forma vitae</i>	• Clare’s process of canonization • Canonical letters • Civil archival documents	• The <i>Legend of Clare</i> • The <i>Versified Legend</i> • The decree of canonization²⁷ • The <i>Legend of Agnes of Assisi</i> • The <i>Legend of Agnes of Prague</i> • Male Franciscan hagiographical sources	• Historical intersections • Archeological evidence • Artistic works

* The Testament and Blessing are of questionable authenticity

²⁶ Théophile Desbonnets, *De l’intuition à l’institution: Les Franciscains* (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1983). In English as *From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans*, trans. Paul Duggan and Jerry Du Charme (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

²⁷ Although functionally a legal document, Pope Alexander IV’s papal proclamation of canonization is textually hagiographical and is, like the *Legend of Clare* and the *Versified Legend*, based on the process of canonization. For the purposes of reconstructing the life of Clare, therefore, it is categorized here it as a hagiographical source.

CLARE'S EARLY LIFE

Although Clare says nothing about her life in the Offreduccio household in her writings, the process of canonization offers direct testimony concerning Clare's youth. A legal proceeding designed to investigate the sanctity of an individual for the purposes of possible canonization, Clare's process presents testimony given under oath, and as such is an invaluable source for Clare's life. Beyond this, there are also archival documents concerning Clare's family that affirm and expand information provided in Clare's process of canonization.

Hagiographical sources based on Clare's process of canonization simply reiterate information from the process with the exception of the *Legend of Clare* whose author affirms that he conducted additional interviews with early companions of Francis and the S. Damiano sisters before writing his text. Given this claim, the *Legend of Clare* must be examined for these details.

Because scholars can construct the early life of Clare from a legal document, the process of canonization, much more can be said with certainty about the early life of Clare than about Francis's youth.²⁸ Clare's process of canonization presents information not only regarding the life of Clare but also concerning the lives of other Assisi noblewomen within Clare's social circle. Details that a clerical hagiographer might have edited as inconsequential can be heard in the process from women and ordinary townspeople who valued the stories of their lives as these intersected with Clare. In reading Clare's process, we meet Clare's friends and neighbors, and hear her story from their local perspective.

CLARE'S PROCESS OF CANONIZATION

Less than two months after the death of Clare, Pope Innocent IV requested that the bishop of Spoleto conduct an inquest into her life.²⁹ On November 24, 1252, the bishop went to the Monastery of

²⁸ Marco Bartoli, "Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara d'Assisi," in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 133–44 (Galatina: Congedo, 1998).

²⁹ *BF* I:684–85. This letter also appears in its entirety as a prologue to Clare's process of canonization.

S. Damiano in Assisi with a team of ecclesiastical officials and Franciscan brothers, and formally interviewed thirteen sisters who had lived in the monastery with Clare.³⁰ Four days later, the team again visited S. Damiano interviewing two more sisters, one who was in the monastic infirmary,³¹ and then proceeded to the Church of S. Paolo in the Assisi square and questioned other Assisi townspeople who had known Clare as a young woman: an elderly knight, Ugolino di Pietro Girardone;³² a childhood friend of Clare, Lady Bona Guelfuccio;³³ a snubbed suitor of Clare, Ranieri di Bernardo;³⁴ a neighbor, Pietro di Damiani;³⁵ and a night watchman in Clare's childhood home, Giovanni di Ventura.³⁶

The first witness, Sister Pacifica de Guelfuccio of Assisi, was a neighbor and a distant relative of Clare who lived across the piazza from the Offreduccio family as a child.³⁷ The first thing Pacifica recalled was that the young Clare had a special affection for the poor and was respected within the town of Assisi as a woman of admirable character.³⁸ Interestingly, Pacifica stated that although she knew Clare's mother, Ortolana, she had never seen her father.³⁹ Pacifica testified that she had accompanied Clare's mother to Rome, Saint Michael on Monte Gargano in Apulia,⁴⁰ and the Holy Land.⁴¹

Pausing to consider the importance of the pilgrimages that Pacifica and Ortolana made offers insight into the education and culture of these Assisi women. Not bound by the confines of their small mountain commune, Clare's mother and Pacifica visited the most important pilgrimage sites in Europe. Pilgrimage, especially to the Holy Land, required enormous resources since medieval pilgrims needed to take sufficient valuables to provide food, clothing, and shelter for the entire

³⁰ *Process*, Prologue: 23–45.

³¹ *Process* 15:1–2.

³² *Process* 16.

³³ *Process* 17.

³⁴ *Process* 18.

³⁵ *Process* 19.

³⁶ *Process* 20.

³⁷ *Process* 1:2.

³⁸ *Process* 1:3.

³⁹ *Process* 1:4.

⁴⁰ For historical information concerning this sixth-century shrine dedicated to Michael the Archangel see John Charles Arnold, "Arcadia becomes Jerusalem: Angelic Caverns and Shrine Conversion at Monte Gargano," *Speculum* 75:3 (2000): 567–88.

⁴¹ *Process* 1:4.

journey. Significant dangers such as shipwreck, illness, vermin infestation, robbery, molestation, and death were common.⁴²

A number of the other sisters also contributed details concerning Clare's early life. Sister Benvenuta of Perugia testified that she had stayed with Clare in the same house before she herself had entered religion.⁴³ Most likely this house was in Perugia, and Clare stayed with Benvenuta while her family was in exile. Benvenuta said that she had followed Clare into the Monastery of S. Damiano only months after Clare entered.⁴⁴ She testified that Clare was eighteen years old when she entered religion and was a virgin.⁴⁵ Sister Filippa confirmed that Clare was a virgin from childhood and that, before she had entered religion, was considered a saint by all who knew her.⁴⁶ Clare's blood sister, Beatrice, also affirmed her sister's virginity and reputation for holiness.⁴⁷ Sister Amata, Clare's niece, testified that Clare had been converted through the exhortation and preaching of S. Francis.⁴⁸ She agreed with Filippa concerning Clare's reputation for holiness even before her conversion.⁴⁹ Sister Cecilia, daughter of the knight, Gualtieri Cacciaguerra of Spoleto, claimed that Clare's mother had told her that when she was pregnant with Clare, as she was praying before the cross asking for protection during childbirth, she heard a voice that said she would give birth to a great light that would brightly illuminate the world.⁵⁰

Moving up the hill from the infirmary of S. Damiano through the Assisi square and into the church of S. Paolo, the bishop and his delegation next interviewed commune citizens who had known the young Clare. The first, the knight Ugolino di Pietro Girardone, testified to Clare's noble lineage asserting that Offreduccio di Bernardino was her grandfather and Lord Favarone, her father.⁵¹ He also witnessed to her

⁴² Rosamund Allen, *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050–1550* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2004), 3–4.

⁴³ *Process* 2:2.

⁴⁴ *Process* 2:1.

⁴⁵ *Process* 2:2.

⁴⁶ *Process* 3:2.

⁴⁷ *Process* 12:1.

⁴⁸ *Process* 4:2.

⁴⁹ *Process* 4:2.

⁵⁰ *Process* 6:12.

⁵¹ *Process* 16:1.

virginity and upright manner of living within the family palazzo, and commented on her kindness and graciousness to all she met.⁵²

Lady Bona, a childhood friend of Clare, testified that she had stayed in Clare's house and had conversed with her.⁵³ Although Clare kept herself sequestered within her home, not wanting to be seen by those passing by the house, Bona testified that she was kind and eager to do good deeds.⁵⁴ According to Bona, Clare often sent food that she was given to eat to the poor, and even sent Bona out at times to distribute it.⁵⁵ Bona seems to have been Clare's messenger, since besides sending her out with food for the poor, Bona claimed that Clare had also given her money to be used as a votive offering for the needs of the Franciscan brothers who were working on the Church of S. Maria degli Angeli.⁵⁶ Bona also stated that before Clare's tonsure, she sent Bona to the shrine of S. James of Compostella in Spain.⁵⁷

Hardly impartial to Clare's cause, the knight, Ranieri di Bernardo of Assisi, suggested to the bishop and his commission that if Clare's sanctity were doubted, faith itself would be devoid of value.⁵⁸ The virgin Clare, according to Ranieri, had from the very beginning of her life paid attention to deeds of holiness as if she had been sanctified in her mother's womb.⁵⁹ Ranieri testified that Clare fasted and prayed in her home, gave as many alms as she could, and, when with others, always spoke of the things of God.⁶⁰ He affirmed that Clare was, both in her material and paternal lineage, from one of the noblest families in Assisi.⁶¹

Ranieri added a personal episode. Apparently, he had been interested in Clare and, when the knights of her family were preparing to negotiate a husband for her, Ranieri expressed his interest. Clare, however, declined her relatives' invitations to consider marriage and, when Ranieri asked her hand, she refused to listen, and preached to

⁵² *Process* 16:2.

⁵³ *Process* 17:1.

⁵⁴ *Process* 17:4.

⁵⁵ *Process* 17:1.

⁵⁶ *Process* 17:7.

⁵⁷ *Process* 17:6.

⁵⁸ *Process* 18:1.

⁵⁹ *Process* 18:1.

⁶⁰ *Process* 18:3.

⁶¹ *Process* 18:4.

him instead about the benefits of despising the world. Ranieri eventually married one of Clare's relatives.⁶²

The nineteenth witness, the knight, Pietro di Damiano of Assisi, testified that he and his father lived near the Offreduccio household⁶³ that, according to Pietro, had seven noble and powerful knights.⁶⁴ Clare's behavior as a young girl was noble, upright, and spiritual in manner. When she was about seventeen, her father, mother, and relatives wanted her to marry a noble and have a magnificent wedding. Clare refused, insisting that she wished to remain a virgin and live in poverty. She lived a holy manner of life, according to Pietro, and could not be convinced to lower her spirit to worldly affairs.⁶⁵

The final witness, Giovanni di Ventura of Assisi, served as a house watchman in Clare's home when she was about eighteen.⁶⁶ At this time, Giovanni testified that Clare was already living as though she were in a monastery;⁶⁷ fasting, praying, doing works of piety, and wearing a rough garment under her clothes.⁶⁸ Although her household was one of the largest and wealthiest in the city, she deprived herself of food and sent what she was given to eat to the poor.⁶⁹

Given this eyewitness testimony, we have a rare glimpse into the life of a young medieval woman within her lived context. Unencumbered for the most part by hagiographical flourishes, Clare's process of canonization focuses on the woman whose life was judged by her friends and neighbors both as blessed and as a blessing to others. Beyond basic facts, we are treated to personal vignettes such as Bona's distribution of Clare's food, Ranieri's unsuccessful advances, and the exposure to international cultures the ladies of Assisi experienced in visiting the pilgrimage sites of their age.

ARCHIVAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL INTERSECTIONS

In 1959, the mayor of Assisi, Arnaldo Fortini, published archival documents that provide information concerning Clare's family and early

⁶² *Process* 18:2.

⁶³ *Process* 19:1.

⁶⁴ *Process* 19:1.

⁶⁵ *Process* 19:2.

⁶⁶ *Process* 20:1–2.

⁶⁷ *Process* 20:2.

⁶⁸ *Process* 20:4–5.

⁶⁹ *Process* 20:3.

life.⁷⁰ After correcting genealogical mistakes made by earlier scholars, Fortini's work collaborates testimony given in the process of canonization. There is ample evidence from the archives of S. Rufino documenting that Clare's family indeed lived near the Church of S. Rufino.⁷¹ The documents demonstrate that the feudatories of Assisi sided with Perugia against the citizens of Assisi, and that noble Assisi families, including Clare's, went to Perugia for a time during the unrest. The duration of Clare's Perugian exile is not known, but, according to Fortini, it probably began during the 1202–1203 conflict between Perugia and Assisi, and may have ended in 1205, when Monaldo released the Perugians from their obligation to fight until the Assisians had paid for the damages done to their noble palazzos.⁷²

Although it is clear that Clare's paternal home was near the Church of S. Rufino, its exact location must be considered in light of the archeology of the medieval structure. The original S. Rufino basilica was situated in the space where the piazza is today. When the new edifice was being constructed, the workers began building it in an empty space, leaving the old church intact, so that the populace could attend Mass in the interim. The location of the current entrance to S. Rufino was originally, therefore, the apse of the original church, and the campanile that stands to the side of the façade today, would have been in line with the apse. The building to the side of the campanile, which is often identified as the house of S. Clare, was actually the side wall of the original church. It was only in the last phase of the construction of the new basilica that the former edifice was demolished and that the front of new church was built in the space where the apse of the old basilica once stood. This last part of the work took place in the first half of the thirteenth century.⁷³

We know of the location of Clare's paternal home from a document found in the S. Rufino archives, dated 1148, in which Offreduccio and Rinaldo, Clare's grandfather and great uncle, promise not to increase the height of their house that was next to the church and next to the road.⁷⁴ The work on the Church of S. Rufino was not yet finished in

⁷⁰ *Nova vita di San Francesco*, vol. III, (Assisi: Porziuncola, 1959).

⁷¹ Fortini notes: Arch. Catt., fasc. II n. 95, 97, 116, 122, 130. See *Nova vita*, vol. III, 286–87, 290, 538, 293.

⁷² Fortini, *Nova vita*, vol. II, 186–90.

⁷³ Fortini, "Nuove notizie intorno a S. Chiara di Assisi," *AFH* 46 (1953): 23–29.

⁷⁴ Arch. Catt., fasc. II n. 98: "iuxta ecclesias et iuxta viam." See Fortini, *Nova Vita*, vol. III, 534–35.

1210, since another document encourages the consul to work so that the construction of S. Rufino can move forward.⁷⁵ In fact in 1216, after Clare was already living in the Monastery of S. Damiano, the canons of S. Rufino asked Pope Honorius III for assistance to finance current and future expenses incurred in the restoration of the Church of S. Rufino.⁷⁶ Only in 1228, was the new basilica complete enough for Pope Gregory IX to consecrate it. The timeline indicates that the S. Rufino that bordered the Offreduccio palazzo was the ancient basilica with a newer construction in process inching its way toward the old edifice.

Although documentary evidence supports testimony given in the process of canonization, does the archival work of Fortini offer anything new? Certainly there appears to be evidence that Clare spent much of her early life in Perugia—a detail that is perhaps alluded to, but not specifically mentioned in the canonization process. Although the precise duration of this exile is not certain, this exile may have lasted from 1202–1205. If this was the case, Clare spent several years of her childhood in Perugia and would, most probably, have been there at the time that Francis was also in Perugia as a prisoner.

MEETINGS BETWEEN CLARE AND FRANCIS

Although Clare writes nothing about her life at home, she does comment concerning her conversion. Included in these references is a mention of her meetings with Francis, as well as an allusion to Francis's prophetic utterance regarding the future of the Church of S. Damiano—if one accepts the authenticity of the problematic Testament. While Clare's writings provide minimal information, the process of canonization is again the main source for knowledge regarding Clare's conversion and escape from her familial home. The testimony of Clare's relatives and friends provides critical details including her sojourn at S. Paolo delle Abbadesse and S. Angelo di Panzo.

In this chapter of Clare's life, hagiographical material contributes additional, but problematic details. Clare's Testament alludes to an episode from the *Legend of the Three Companions* concerning an early prophecy of Francis regarding the Poor Ladies. The *Legend of Clare*

⁷⁵ See Alfonso Brizi, "La facciata del duomo d'Assisi non è opera di Giovanni da Gubbio," *Atti dell'Accademia Properziana del Subasio in Assisi* 3 (1910): 180–82.

⁷⁶ Arch. Catt., August 17, 1216, IX,1. See Fortini, *Nova vita*, vol. III, 592–93.

also seems to suggest the bishop of Assisi's cooperation in Clare's escape from her familial home within the context of the Palm Sunday liturgy,⁷⁷ as well as the trials of Clare's familial sister, Catherine, as she endured the wrath of her uncle Monaldo and other knights after she joined Clare at the Monastery of S. Angelo di Panzo. While the episcopal episode and Catherine's flight may have been among the additional details gathered by the author of the *Legend of Clare*, the historical veracity of Francis's prophecy concerning the Poor Ladies is more difficult to substantiate.

Archival sources and historical considerations also provide information. Archival documents regarding S. Paolo delle Abbadesse and S. Angelo di Panzo confirm the existence of these religious establishments and provide rationale for their respective roles in Clare's escape. Historical consideration of Clare's tonsure is important as it defines Clare's conversion as a choice for a penitential lifestyle.

CLARE'S WRITINGS

In 1209, Francis fashioned a variety of gospel texts into a *forma vitae* for his brothers. Traveling to Rome, the fraternity met with Pope Innocent III and requested approval for their way of life and permission to preach. Receiving oral permission from the pope,⁷⁸ Francis and his brothers returned to the valley below Assisi settling first at Rivo Torto and then at the Portiuncola.⁷⁹ It was after his return that he began meeting with Clare. In her *forma vitae*, Clare affirmed that she was inspired both by Francis's example and teaching, and that the purpose of her conversion was "to do penance."

After the Most High Father of the heavens saw fit by his grace to enlighten my heart to do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed father, Saint Francis, shortly after his own conversion, I, together with my sisters, willingly promised him obedience.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Concerning this episode in Clare's life see Chiara Frugoni, "La fuga di Chiara dalla casa paterna," in *Verum, pulchrum et bonum: Miscellanea di studi offerti a Servus Gieben in occasione del suo 80° compleanno*, ed. Yoannes Teklemariam, 321–36 (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 2006).

⁷⁸ Frances Andrews, "Innocent III and Evangelical Enthusiasts: The Route to Approval," in *Pope Innocent III and His World*, ed. John C. Moore and Brenda Boltan, 231–33 (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999).

⁷⁹ *L3C* 46–56.

⁸⁰ *FLCl* 6:1.

Although providing testimony to her early association with S. Francis, Clare fails to offer additional details. For these, it is necessary to study the testimony of witnesses in Clare's process of canonization.

THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION

Some of the witnesses of Clare's process of canonization provide further information concerning the meetings that led to Clare's flight from the Offreduccio palazzo. Clare's neighbor, Sister Pacifica, testified that Clare began the Order at S. Damiano through the admonition of S. Francis.⁸¹ Regarding the length of time that Clare lived at S. Damiano, Pacifica stated that it had been about forty-two years. Pacifica testified that she knew this because she had entered the monastery at the same time as Clare. The second witness, Sister Benvenuta of Perugia also affirmed that Clare had entered the monastery about forty-two years previously.⁸² Clare had entered on Holy Monday, while Sister Benvenuta entered the following September.⁸³ Sister Filippa confirmed the same basic timeline adding that she, through the preaching of S. Francis, had entered four years after Clare.⁸⁴ The sixth witness, Sister Cecilia, testified that it had been about forty-three years that Clare had been governing the sisters.⁸⁵

Regarding Clare and Francis's first encounters, Sister Amata testified that Clare had entered the monastery through the exhortation and preaching of S. Francis even though her virtuous reputation was well-established before this.⁸⁶ Clare's younger blood sister, Sister Beatrice, described how Clare embraced her penitential conversion. According to Beatrice, when Francis heard of Clare's holiness, he often went to preach to her.⁸⁷ Clare accepted Francis's preaching and sold both her and part of Beatrice's inheritance and gave it to the poor.⁸⁸ Francis then tonsured Clare before the altar of S. Maria degli Angeli in the valley below Assisi and then sent her to the Church of S. Paolo delle

⁸¹ *Process* 1:2.

⁸² *Process* 2:2.

⁸³ *Process* 2:1.

⁸⁴ *Process* 3:1.

⁸⁵ *Process* 6:1.

⁸⁶ *Process* 4:2.

⁸⁷ *Process* 12:2.

⁸⁸ *Process* 12:3.

Abbadesse. When her relatives came to S. Paolo to drag her home, Clare clung to the altar clothes and revealed her tonsured head.⁸⁹ Seeing that she no longer had the potential beauty to be bartered as a bride, her family likely disowned her and abandoned her to her fate. With Clare's safety from her relatives assured, Francis, Brother Bernard, and Brother Philip took Clare to the Church of S. Angelo di Panzo near S. Damiano, where there lived a small settlement of penitential women. Clare stayed there a short while before moving permanently to S. Damiano. When asked when all this happened, Beatrice replied, as the others, that it had been about forty-two years ago.⁹⁰

Sister Cristiana, testified that she was in the Offreduccio house when Clare escaped from her paternal home. According to Cristiana, Clare feared that if she attempted to leave through the usual door, she would be stopped. There was another exit that was fortified with heavy wooden beams and an iron bar. When Clare was discovered to be missing, many were amazed that a young woman had the strength to open this door. Cristiana agreed with the others that this happened about forty-two years before when Clare was eighteen.⁹¹ She also testified that while Clare lived in her family home, everyone knew her to be virtuous and holy.⁹² She noted that when Clare was selling her inheritance, some of her relatives wanted her to give them a better price, but Clare refused to sell to them so that the poor would not be defrauded. Everything she received from the sale of her inheritance, she gave to the poor.⁹³

In the Church of S. Paolo, the knight, Ugolino di Pietro Girardone, agreed with Sister Pacifica saying that while Francis founded the Order of Lesser Brothers, it was Clare who founded the Order of Enclosed Ladies.⁹⁴ She entered the Order, everyone knew, through the exhortation and preaching of S. Francis. Girardone said that he had heard that S. Francis had given her the tonsure at S. Maria of the Portiuncola.⁹⁵

Lady Bona testified that she had stayed with Clare while she was in her family's home.⁹⁶ Because of Clare's desire to serve God, Bona

⁸⁹ *Process* 12:4.

⁹⁰ *Process* 12:5.

⁹¹ *Process* 13:1.

⁹² *Process* 13:2.

⁹³ *Process* 13:11.

⁹⁴ *Process* 16:1–2.

⁹⁵ *Process* 16:3–6.

⁹⁶ *Process* 16:1.

revealed that she had many times accompanied Clare to speak with Francis. These meetings were held in secret, Bona stated, so that Clare's parents would not know about them.⁹⁷ Bona said that both S. Francis and Brother Philip preached to Clare about converting to Jesus Christ, and affirmed that all this happened more than forty-two years ago, since Clare had entered religion when she was eighteen.⁹⁸ Bona testified that she had been in Rome to observe Lent when Francis tonsured Clare in the Church of S. Maria.⁹⁹

Lord Ranieri di Bernardo stated that after her conversion, Clare had her hair tonsured by Francis as quickly as possible. When her relatives wanted to take her from S. Paolo and bring her back to Assisi, she would not go with them. After she showed them her tonsured head, they let her stay.¹⁰⁰ The former Offreduccio house watchman, Giovanni di Ventura, reiterated the same details.¹⁰¹

HAGIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

Perhaps the most difficult vignette to date and authenticate concerning Clare's life before entering S. Damiano is the prophecy of Francis that appears both in the *Legend of the Three Companions*¹⁰² and the questionable Testament of Clare. In the *Legend of the Three Companions*, Francis was working with others on rebuilding the Church of S. Damiano. There he had the habit of calling out to those who passed by saying, in French: "Come and help me repair the Church of S. Damiano that, in the future, will be a monastery of ladies whose fame and life will glorify our heavenly Father throughout the church."¹⁰³ The passages from Clare's Testament and the *Legend of the Three Companions* concerning this episode are almost identical.

⁹⁷ *Process* 16:2–3.

⁹⁸ *Process* 16:3–4.

⁹⁹ *Process* 16:5.

¹⁰⁰ *Process* 18:3.

¹⁰¹ *Process* 20:6.

¹⁰² Concerning the *Legend of the Three Companions*, see Fernando Uribe, *Introduzione alle fonti agiografiche di san Francesco e santa Chiara d'Assisi [sec. XIII–XIV]* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2002), 195–228.

¹⁰³ *L3C* 24:5.

The <i>Legend of the Three Companions</i>	Clare's Testament
"Venite et adiuuate me in opera ecclesiae Sancti Damiani quae futura est monasterium dominarum, quarum fama et vita in universali ecclesia glorificabitur Pater noster caelestis."	"Venite et adiuuate me in opere monasterii Sancti Damiani, quoniam adhuc erunt dominae ibi, quarum famosa vita et conversatione sancta glorificabitur Pater noster caelestis in universa ecclesia sua sancta."

Regis Armstrong suggests that the passage in the *Legend of the Three Companions* seems to come from the witness of Clare herself since it is similar to her Testament. According to Armstrong, "Francis was more certain at that early period of helping to establish a monastery of women than a religious order of men."¹⁰⁴ Jacques Dalarun proposes that Francis's prophecy was simply a literary device that the writer of the *Legend of the Three Companions* used to bridge the six years separating the rebuilding of the Church of S. Damiano and the conversion of Clare.¹⁰⁵ This may be true, but if one were to delete prophetic and mystical utterances in the *Legend of the Three Companions*, one would negate much of the text. In Dalarun's defense, the *Legend of Clare* offers a litany of male/female intersections pivoting on the imagery of the Monastery of S. Damiano. The author of the *Legend of Clare* notes that the church was repaired by Francis, that a voice spoke to Francis there from the cross, that Clare took S. Damiano as her abode, and that she began the Order of Poor Ladies there.¹⁰⁶ Although the author of the *Legend of Clare* interviewed both early companions of Francis and the sisters of S. Damiano, Francis's prophecy is not mentioned in this text where it would fit most naturally, giving credence to Dalarun's theory.

Maria Pia Alberzoni interprets the pericope from the political perspective of 1228.¹⁰⁷ Because Gregory IX was pressuring Clare to accept

¹⁰⁴ Regis Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York, NY: New City Press, 2006), 408. See also Regis Armstrong, "Clare of Assisi, the Poor Ladies and their Ecclesial Mission in the *First Life* of Thomas of Celano," *Laurentianum* 32 (1991): 104–45.

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Dalarun, *Francis of Assisi and the Feminine* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2006), 196–98.

¹⁰⁶ *LegCl* 10.

¹⁰⁷ Maria Pia Alberzoni, "San Damiano nel 1228: Contributo alla *questione clariana*," *CF* 67 (1997): 470–76.

possessions for her monastery, Francis's original vision of the S. Damiano monastery would have been essential at this juncture. Alberzoni's argument is compelling, and propels this story of Clare's beginnings into a later chapter.¹⁰⁸

The *Versified Legend of Clare* and the *Legend of Clare* add one more vignette to the saga of Clare's escape from her family home. Of the two writings, the *Versified Legend* seems to have been written first, since it does not record the canonization of Clare and has problematic passages that are clarified in the *Legend of Clare*. One of these passages involves an episode that the *Versified Legend* claims happened on Palm Sunday. With the encouragement of Francis, Clare entered the S. Rufino cathedral dressed in her finery. While the crowd was pushing forward to receive palm branches, Clare hesitated. Seeing her, Bishop Guido took a palm branch and presented it personally to Clare as "a special honor."¹⁰⁹

This story is vague, unique, and needs further amplification before one might be convinced that the proud Bishop Guido would notice a young woman in the crowd and personally see to it that she had a palm as "a special honor." While one might dismiss the vignette as merely an attempt to insert the bishop of Assisi into the Clare story, the author of the *Legend of Clare* seems to have anticipated these objections. Given a papal order to write the official *legenda*—the story of Clare's life that was to be read aloud in a monastic setting—the writer of Clare's *Legend* assured his readers that he not only used information that had already been gathered in the canonization process, but went to Assisi himself to interview further the companions of Clare and Francis. His philosophy as a historian was that "no one should write history unless he had seen it himself or had learned of it from those who had been there."¹¹⁰ Following this methodology, he took care to assure his readers that he began to write only after he had completed his own interviews with both Francis's companions and the S. Damiano community who instructed him "in the complete truth."¹¹¹ He particularly hoped that the sisters of S. Damiano would be pleased

¹⁰⁸ See also the analysis of Marco Guida who develops Alberzoni's argument, "La pericope clariano-damianita di *Vita Beati Francisci* VIII, 18–20: Un'aggiunta all'opera di Tommaso da Celano?" *CF* 77 (2007): 5–26.

¹⁰⁹ *Versified Legend* 7:265–275.

¹¹⁰ *LegCl* Preface 11.

¹¹¹ *LegCl* Preface 12.

with his text and seems to have received an admonition from them not to make the text unintelligible with “an excess of words.”¹¹² We might read into this statement, the sisters’ own critique of the flowery *Versified Legend*.

When speaking of Clare’s refusal of a noble marriage, Clare’s *Legend* adds the interesting detail that Clare delayed the expectations of her family, feigning that she intended to marry at a later time.¹¹³ The *Legend* also addresses the reciprocal nature of Clare and Francis’s conversations before Clare’s conversion—something, of course, that the sisters would have been solicitous to clarify during the interview. Hearing of Francis’s preaching, Clare wanted to meet him; Francis also desired to meet and speak with Clare, as he was impressed with her reputation. The author of the *Legend* claimed that Francis “visited her and she more frequently him, moderating the times of their visits so that no one would notice this divine pursuit or gossip about it.”¹¹⁴ Clare left her home for these visits, according to the *Legend*, with only one close companion.¹¹⁵

Obviously the story of Palm Sunday from the *Versified Legend* needed amplification. According to the author of the *Legend of Clare*, it was Francis who directed Clare to appear beautifully dressed in the cathedral on Palm Sunday. While the other women moved forward to receive their palms, Clare remained immobile in her place out of shyness. Noticing this, the bishop came down the steps and placed a palm in her hands. That night, she embarked upon her flight, along with a virtuous companion, leaving by way of the barricaded door.¹¹⁶

The author of Clare’s *Legend* also added details to the story concerning Clare’s flight from her paternal home and her eventual settlement at S. Damiano. When Clare arrived at S. Maria of the Portiuncola, according to the author of the *Legend*—who, it must be admitted, seems to have a proclivity for either providing or inventing liturgical flourishes—the brothers were observing vigils before the altar and received her with torches. Her hair was shorn by the brothers, and she set aside her beautiful dress.¹¹⁷ When her relatives found her

¹¹² *LegCl* Preface 13.

¹¹³ *LegCl* 3:10.

¹¹⁴ *LegCl* 5:3.

¹¹⁵ *LegCl* 5:4.

¹¹⁶ *LegCl* 7:2–7.

¹¹⁷ *LegCl* 8:8–9.

at S. Paolo, they employed a number of schemes to persuade Clare to return including petitions, flattering promises, and violent force. When she revealed her tonsured head, she insisted that she would not be torn away from her service to Christ. According to Clare's *Legend*, this familial dispute occurred over a number of days until her relatives finally left her to her fate.¹¹⁸ Adding the detail that Clare stayed at S. Paolo only a few days before leaving for S. Angelo di Panzo, the author states that Clare's "mind was not completely at peace," and that she moved to S. Damiano at the advice of S. Francis.¹¹⁹ Once she arrived at S. Damiano, she feared neither the confinement nor the isolation of the small church.¹²⁰

The *Legend of Clare* adds another vignette to the pre-S. Damiano life of Clare. After she had left the world, Clare prayed that her sister, Catherine, might join her in her new life. Sixteen days after Clare's conversion, the *Legend* says, God answered Clare's prayer and Catherine appeared at S. Angelo di Panzo. The following day, twelve men descended upon the small Monastery of S. Angelo led by Clare's uncle, Monaldo. When Catherine refused to return to Assisi with them, they beat her and dragged her away by the hair. At some point, they were unable to move her further and joked that she had been eating lead all night. Clare begged them to entrust Catherine to her care, and most likely because of Catherine's injuries, the knights abandoned her to her fate. Francis cut Catherine's hair with his own hand and directed both Clare and Catherine in the way of the Lord. A chronicle of the early Order adds that Catherine was given the name "Agnes" by Francis himself.¹²¹

S. PAOLO DELLE ABBADESSE, S. ANGELO DI PANZO, AND CLARE'S TONSURE

Archival records exist affirming the existence of the monasteries that sheltered Clare before she moved to the Monastery of S. Damiano. The Benedictine monastery of S. Paolo delle Abbadesse was located in

¹¹⁸ *LegCl* 9:1–6.

¹¹⁹ *LegCl* 10:7.

¹²⁰ *LegCl* 10:8.

¹²¹ "Vita Sororis Agnetis: Germanae Sanctae Clarae," in *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*, AF III (1897): 183.

Bastia in what is today a cemetery near the Chiagio river. A 1198, bull of Pope Innocent III to Bishop Guido of Assisi lists the Monastery of S. Paolo among other churches and chapels in the rural areas near Assisi subject to the bishop's jurisdiction. The monastery is listed between the parish churches of S. Costanzo and S. Venanzio both which bordered S. Paolo delle Abbadesse.¹²² In addition, a document preserved in the Monastery of S. Apollinare in Assisi contains a copy of a May 5, 1201, bull of Innocent III that gave a number of important privileges to this monastery. This bull attests that the monastery was Benedictine and lists usual privileges such as freedom from molestation, monastic ownership of goods, and freedom from tithes. Most interesting for the history of Clare is that the monastery specifically had the privilege "to receive and retain without opposition free and freed persons fleeing the world to conversion." This right of sanctuary was, of course, the exact privilege that Clare needed to thwart the intervention of her relatives. The knights of Clare's family were wise enough not to incur the excommunication that was leveled against anyone who molested someone who had taken refuge in this monastery.¹²³

Once Clare's relatives understood that her decision was irrevocable, Francis, Bernard, and Philip escorted Clare to the Church of S. Angelo di Panzo.¹²⁴ This church is located on the eastern slope of Mount Subasio on the upper road to Spello not far from S. Damiano. The Monastery of S. Angelo di Panzo appears in a list of churches that were under the jurisdiction of the cathedral, dated from 1217.¹²⁵ Later in a December 17, 1238, bull of Gregory IX, the monastery is referred to as belonging to the Order of S. Damiano.¹²⁶ Regarding the Monastery of S. Damiano, archeological work on this monastery is in its beginning stages and shows evidence of the renovation indicated in the Franciscan sources.¹²⁷

¹²² For the text of this document of Pope Innocent III see Fortini, *Nova vita*, vol. III, 543–45.

¹²³ Fortini, *Nova vita*, vol. III: 548–51.

¹²⁴ *Process* 12:5. On the history of S. Angelo di Panzo see Francesco Santucci, "S. Angelo di Panzo presso Assisi," *Atti Accademia Propeziana del Subasio a Assisi*, 13 (1986): 83–112.

¹²⁵ Fortini, *Nova vita*, vol. III: 594–96.

¹²⁶ *BF* I:258.

¹²⁷ Letizia Ermini Pani, Maria Grazia Fichera, Maria Letizia Mancinelli, *Indagini archeologiche nella chiesa di S. Damiano in Assisi* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2005); see also Mary Angelina Filipiak, "The Plans of the Poor Clares' Convents in Central

As a historical intersection, one might question the significance of Clare's tonsure.¹²⁸ Was the cutting of Clare's hair a liturgical gesture? Did it signify Clare's entrance into religious life? If so, how could Francis who was neither a bishop nor priest claim the authority to administer the tonsure?¹²⁹

One way for a medieval woman to emancipate herself from familial demands regarding marriage was to cut her hair and wear a penitential garb. Ecclesiastical authority was not needed for these actions, but their public character demanded that the church provide those who donned such signs of penitence with a measure of protection from civil and familial authority. While the tonsure signaled that one had left the world, it did not play a role in the ceremony for the consecration of virgins that focused instead on the conferring of the habit, veil, ring, and crown. Such a consecration would not have occurred during Holy Week—the most solemn penitential week of the liturgical year. Francis did not officiate in Clare's religious profession at S. Maria degli Angeli, but rather witnessed Clare's definitive choice to forsake her family and familial values in order to follow Christ in a penitential life.¹³⁰

Clare, therefore, had two defenses against the knights of her family who appeared at the Monastery of S. Paolo. First, she took refuge in a monastery that had the papal privilege to excommunicate anyone who violated its inhabitants. Second, the cutting of her hair made her worthless as a bride and made her choice irrevocable. Once she had defined herself as a penitent, she was free to pursue her vision of following Christ. She would spend the rest of her life at the Monastery of S. Damiano.

Italy from the Thirteenth through the Fifteenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1957), 92–103.

¹²⁸ The crucial essay concerning this topic is Luigi Padovese, "La tonsura di Chiara: Gesto di consacrazione o segno di penitenza?" *Laurentianum* 31 (1990): 389–404.

¹²⁹ Paul Sabatier, *Vie de Saint François d'Assise* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1926), 173.

¹³⁰ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Belief and Devotional Practices* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 121.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MONASTERY OF S. DAMIANO

Clare and the sisters of S. Damiano were part of a larger thirteenth-century “women’s movement” that sprang up throughout all of Europe and manifested itself in differing local expressions. In central Italy, S. Damiano represents the best known monastery of this movement. When Jacques de Vitry, the Liège bishop and chronicler, visited Umbria in 1216, he observed that while the “lesser brothers” worked in cities and villages during the day and returned to their hermitages by night, the “lesser sisters” lived in hospices located near the cities and supported themselves by manual labor.¹ While such outside observations are useful, the question remains: Exactly how did Clare and her sisters live their penitential life within the S. Damiano enclosure?

The best guides for examining Clare’s monastic life are the sisters who lived with her.² Only months after Clare’s death, Pope Innocent IV issued the October 18, 1253, bull, *Gloriosus Deus*,³ which entrusted Bishop Bartholomew of Spoleto with the task of conducting a formal inquiry into Clare’s life, conversion, and monastic deportment.⁴ Because of this inquiry, preserved in an Umbrian Italian text of the fifteenth century, we possess legal testimony given under oath by Clare’s sisters.⁵ In addition, the author of the *Legend of Clare* testified that

¹ *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry: Édition critique*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 69–78.

² Paolo Cabano, “Chiara, Agnese e le prime Damianite nell’agiografia francescana primitiva,” *Forma Sororum* 25 (1988): 187–201; Giovanna Casagrande, “Le compagne di Chiara,” in *Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 381–425 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1993); and Giovanna Casagrande, “Chiara e le compagne attraverso il testo del processo,” in *Dialoghi con Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Luigi Giacometti, 1–20 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995).

³ *BF* I:684–85.

⁴ See Marco Bartoli’s analysis of Clare’s canonization process from these three perspectives in “Chiara d’Assisi: Donna del secolo XIII,” in *Chiara d’Assisi e il movimento clariano in Puglia*, ed. Pasquale Corsi and Ferdinando Maggiore, 15–32 (Cassano delle Murge: Messaggi, 1996); Marco Bartoli, “Il processo di canonizzazione come fonte per la ricostruzione del profilo storico di Chiara d’Assisi,” in *Dialoghi con Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Luigi Giacometti, 53–66 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1996).

⁵ Zefferino Lazzeri, “Il processo di canonizzazione di Santa Chiara d’Assisi,” *AFH* 13 (1920): 403–507. Concerning the significance of Clare’s canonization process see

he visited the Monastery of S. Damiano to interview the sisters, to supplement essential details, and to clear up problematic points before completing his work. While these details must be discerned within a later political climate that was resistant to Franciscan sisters, they also clarify issues left unsolved by Clare's process.⁶ As a result of these critical sources, Clare is one of the few women of the thirteenth century whose life can be confidently reconstructed not on the basis of clerical witnesses, but in a truly feminine voice.

In obedience to Innocent IV's command, Bartholomew testified that he went personally to the Monastery of S. Damiano on November 24, 1253, and interviewed the sisters who had lived with Clare the longest within the monastery.⁷ During this interview, the sisters testified in the following order:

1. Sister Pacifica, daughter of Guelfuccio of Assisi
Pacifica knew Clare before her conversion and was among her first companions. Her family lived across the piazza from Clare as part of the consortium of noble families surrounding the Cathedral of S. Rufino.
2. Sister Benvenuta of Perugia
The third companion of Clare to enter S. Damiano. It is possible that Clare stayed with Benvenuta as a young girl when the Favarone family was forced to flee Assisi during the civil unrest at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and live in Perugia.
3. Sister Filippa, daughter of Leonardo di Gislerio of Assisi
Another of Assisi's nobility, Filippa's family also had to escape to Perugia during the civil unrest in Assisi.
4. Sister Amata, daughter of Martino de Coccorano
A niece of Clare and a familial sister to the seventh witness, Sister Balvina.
5. Sister Cristiana, daughter of Cristiano de Parisse
A daughter of one of the consuls of the commune of Assisi.

André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶ Conversely, Clare's process of canonization provides information that was edited out of the *Legend*. For an analysis of the intersection of these two documents see Marco Bartoli, "Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara d'Assisi," in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. G. Andenna and B. Vetere, 133–44 (Galatina: Congedo, 1997).

⁷ Archival details concerning some of these sisters can be found in Arnaldo Fortini, "Nuove notizie intorno a S. Chiara di Assisi," *AfH* 46 (1953): 3–43.

6. Sister Cecilia, daughter of Gualtieri Cacciaguerra of Spoleto
One of the first of Clare's companions at S. Damiano.
7. Sister Balvina, daughter of Martino of Coccorano
A niece of Clare and a familial sister to the fourth witness, Sister Amata.
8. Sister Lucia of Rome
Sister Lucia entered S. Damiano as a child.
9. Sister Francesca, daughter of Capitaneo of Col de Mezzo
Her family's castle was located between Assisi and Todi.
10. Sister Agnes, daughter of Oportulo de Bernardo of Assisi
The daughter of the podestà of Assisi, Oportulo de Bernardo, for whom Francis composed the verses concerning pardon and peace in his *Canticle of the Creatures*. She entered S. Damiano when very young.
11. Sister Benvenuta, daughter of Lady Diambra of Assisi
Little is known about Sister Benvenuta other than the identity of her mother.
12. Sister Beatrice, daughter of Favarone of Assisi
Clare's youngest blood sister, the third and youngest daughter of the Offreduccio family.
13. Sister Cristiana, daughter of Sir Bernardo da Suppo of Assisi
Daughter of one of Assisi's noble families.
14. Sister Angeluccia, daughter of Angelico of Spoleto
Her father was a Spoleto noble.
15. Sister Balvina of Porzano
The interrogators interviewed Sister Balvina in the S. Damiano infirmary.

Clare's process of canonization contains a wealth of material regarding Clare's life within the S. Damiano monastery. To organize this material, the author of the *Legend* writes of Clare's virtues interspersed with miracle stories intended to amaze and edify the reader. Because the cultivation of virtue, which gives vitality and energy to the enclosed life, might seem pedantic to those living in the public sphere, the author of the *Legend* faced the challenge of bridging the feminine enclosed life with a public audience.

The cloistered life is not measured by ambition and time, but by a relationship with God that has a life and dynamism of its own. Its honorarium revolves around prayer and work. One works to avoid idleness, and enters into occupations needed for the upkeep of the monastery and suitable to the pursuit of constant prayer. Integrating

the rhythm of prayer and work occurs over a lifetime, and the union of the divine and human within the monastic person purges the temptation to idolize this union as well as to deny it. One finds in the sisters' testimony, stories that are genuinely, even at times desperately human, all within the context of an exemplary monastic life. Sisters who experienced the depths of spiritual intimacy could also express, with utter abandon, raw frustration with human sickness, crushing sorrow, and their own need for God.

In an attempt to describe life within the S. Damiano monastery, this chapter follows the lead of the witnesses as they detail Clare's life. When the *Legend* adds pertinent details concerning the testimony of a sister, excepting those details that seem to have a political rather than a historical motive, these details will be noted. Unlike the *Legend*, this text addresses modern historical interests by organizing not around Clare's virtues, but rather around aspects of Clare's monastic life as these were described by her sisters.

PRAYER

Given the centrality of prayer in the monastic life, it is no wonder that many of the S. Damiano sisters discussed details regarding Clare's prayer. Clare's neighbor and distant relative, Sister Pacifica, who was one of the first sisters to join Clare in her penitential life, stated that Clare spent much of the night in vigilant prayer. She provided details as to how Clare prayed, stating that she lay on the ground and used a rock from the river for her head. Pacifica testified that she heard Clare pray, although she did not provide details as to the content of Clare's prayer.⁸ The author of the *Legend of Clare* must have inquired further about this during his interviews and provides the information that Clare frequently repeated the *Prayer of the Five Wounds of the Lord*, recited Francis's *Office of the Cross* with deep affection, and wore under her habit a small cord marked with thirteen knots as a secret reminder of the wounds of the Savior.⁹

Concerning the fruits of Clare's prayer, Pacifica stated that when Clare came from prayer, she admonished and comforted her sisters with God's words. The sisters rejoiced in this consolation and felt as

⁸ *Process* 1:7.

⁹ *LegCl* 30:7–9.

though she had come to them from heaven. Clare was so focused on the things of God that she did not want to speak or hear of worldly things.¹⁰ Sister Amata testified that when Clare returned from prayer, her face was more beautiful than the sun, and her words sent forth an indescribable sweetness so her life seemed utterly heavenly.¹¹ Sister Cecilia confirmed the same, saying that there were times, when Clare returned from prayer, that her face appeared clearer than usual and a kind of sweetness came from her mouth.¹² She also mentioned that Clare wept abundantly when she prayed.¹³

Sister Benvenuta testified concerning Clare's perseverance in prayer. About midnight, Clare would light the lamps in the church and often rang the bell for Matins. If certain sisters slept through the bell, she silently and gently woke them.¹⁴ Before Clare became ill, Benvenuta had seen in the place where Clare usually prayed a light so brilliant that she thought it was an actual fire.¹⁵ Even while she was ill, Clare did not wish to omit her customary prayers.¹⁶

Sister Filippa testified that Clare was so caught up in contemplating the Passion of the Lord during the day on Good Friday that she was almost insensible both on Good Friday and most of Holy Saturday.¹⁷ She also reported that Clare once related a vision in which it seemed to her that she brought a bowl of hot water to Francis along with a towel for drying his hands. She was climbing up a long stairway, but was going very quickly, almost as if she were on level ground. When she reached Francis, the saint bared his breast and said to Clare: "Come, take, and drink." After Clare had sucked from it, the saint admonished her to imbibe once again. She reported that she was unable to describe the sweetness and delightfulness of what she had tasted. After Clare had drunk, the nipple of the breast remained between her lips. When she took what remained in her mouth into her hands, it seemed to her that it was gold so clear and bright that everything was reflected

¹⁰ *Process* 1:9.

¹¹ *Process* 4:4.

¹² *Process* 6:3.

¹³ *Process* 6:4.

¹⁴ *Process* 2:9.

¹⁵ *Process* 2:17.

¹⁶ *Process* 2:19.

¹⁷ *Process* 3:25.

in it as in a mirror.¹⁸ Sisters Amata, Cecilia, and Balvina also testified concerning this vision.¹⁹

Sister Francesca stated that once during Calendimaggio²⁰ she had seen in Clare's lap, near her breast, a young boy who was indescribably beautiful. She felt an inexpressible sweetness at this sight and believed, without doubt, that this boy was the Son of God. Francesca also said that she had seen about Clare's head two wings, brilliant as the sun, which at times were raised on high and at other times covered Clare's head. She stated that she was the only one who had seen this vision and would never have spoken of it except to praise so holy a mother.²¹

Sister Agnes, the daughter of Oportolo de Bernardo, the podestà of Assisi, stated that Clare prayed with an abundance of tears for a long time after Compline. Her devotion was especially fervent at the hour of Sext because of her mindfulness that the Lord was placed on the cross at that hour.²²

Regarding her sacramental life, Sister Benvenuta testified that Clare frequently confessed and received the sacrament of the Eucharist with such devotion that she visibly trembled when she received communion.²³ Sister Filippa also mentioned that Clare wept profusely whenever she received the body of Jesus Christ.²⁴ On the evening when Clare died, she encouraged her sisters and made such a beautiful and sincere confession that the witnesses were amazed. She made this confession because she feared that she may have offended the faith promised at her baptism.²⁵

Sister Francesca reported that after Mass one morning, near the Feast of S. Martin about three years before Clare died, the sisters believed that Clare was near death, and the priest gave her Holy Communion. Francesca stated that she saw a great splendor around Clare's head as though the Lord's body was a tiny and beautiful young boy. After Clare received the Eucharist with great devotion and tears, as was her custom, she said: "God has given such a gift to me today that heaven

¹⁸ *Process* 3:29.

¹⁹ *Process* 4:16; 6:13; 7:10.

²⁰ Gemma Fortini, "Calendimaggio in Assisi: Fu in una di queste feste in Maggio che il giovane Francesco lasciò," *S. Francesco Patrono d'Italia* 60 (1980): 310–12.

²¹ *Process* 9:4.

²² *Process* 10:3.

²³ *Process* 2:11.

²⁴ *Process* 3:7.

²⁵ *Process* 3:23.

and earth can not equal it." Francesca did not know if any of the other sisters had witnessed this vision.²⁶

ABSTINENCE AND PENANCE

Although consoled by Clare's prayer, the sisters concurrently admired and were concerned about the extreme penances that she practiced. Sister Pacifica claimed that Clare kept so many abstinences that she and the sisters were alarmed and lamented over her condition. According to Pacifica, Clare was so strict with her fasting that the sisters wondered how she survived. Three days of the week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, she ate nothing at all, and on other days, she consumed only bread and water. Sister Pacifica testified that these practices undermined her health, and because of this, Francis and the bishop of Assisi commanded her to eat at least a half a roll of bread during her Monday, Wednesday, and Friday fasts.²⁷

Sister Benvenuta of Perugia confirmed the details of Sister Pacifica's testimony stating that before Clare became ill, she abstained vigorously during Lent and the Lent of S. Martin. According to Benvenuta, Clare always fasted on bread and water except on Sundays when she drank a little wine when it was available. She affirmed Sister Pacifica's claim that Clare did not consume anything on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday until Francis commanded her to eat something every day. She complied by taking a little bread and water on these days.²⁸ Sister Amata stated the same as Benvenuta regarding Clare's fasting and her obedience to Francis and added that the portions Clare consumed were so small that it seemed that she was fed by angels.²⁹

In regard to her clothing, Sister Benvenuta testified that Clare had only one tunic made of low-grade wool commonly worn by peasants, and a mantle. If she noticed that a sister in the monastery had a tunic worse than hers, she exchanged her tunic with the sister. When Clare was younger, Benvenuta stated that she secretly wore a boar's hide shirt under her tunic with its bristles next to her skin. At another time, she tied around her body a shirt made of horsehair knotted with cords.

²⁶ *Process* 9:10.

²⁷ *Process* 1:7-8.

²⁸ *Process* 2:8.

²⁹ *Process* 4:5.

According to Sister Benvenuta, one of these horsehair shirts was still in the S. Damiano monastery at the time of Clare's death. Certain sisters also tried wearing these hair shirts but, when they were unable to endure them, Clare willingly extended kindness to them. Sister Agnes claimed that Clare once loaned her the sackcloth made of horsehair for three days, but she could not tolerate it.³⁰ When Clare became ill, the sisters took the horsehair shirt away from her.³¹

Sister Filippa testified that Clare slept on a bed made of vine branches.³² Sister Balvina stated that she had not seen Clare's bed of vine branches, although she had heard about it, but rather she had seen another bed made of a kind of crude table.³³ Sister Agnes said that Clare's bed was made of twigs, but after she was ill, she slept on a sack of straw at the command of Francis.³⁴

According to Sister Cecilia, after Clare had heard that certain brothers had been martyred in Morocco, she desired to go there and endure martyrdom for love of the Lord. Perhaps remembering her fear that Clare might leave them, Cecilia wept as she recounted this story. All this happened, Cecilia stated, before Clare became ill. Cecilia testified that the other sisters who had witnessed this event had died.³⁵ Sister Balvina, however, corrected Sister Cecilia's testimony saying that she had been in the monastery with Clare for more than thirty-six years and also knew that for the defense of the faith and her Order, Clare had desired to go to those areas of Morocco where the brothers had suffered martyrdom.³⁶

CLARE'S PRESENCE WITH HER SISTERS

Clare's canonization process is a testimony to the S. Damiano sisters' respect and affection for her. Pacifica stated that when Clare asked her sisters to do something, she did this with great humility, wishing that she herself might do what she was asking of her sister.³⁷ She was

³⁰ *Process* 10:1.

³¹ *Process* 2:4–7.

³² *Process* 3:4.

³³ *Process* 6:4.

³⁴ *Process* 10:7.

³⁵ *Process* 6:6.

³⁶ *Process* 7:2.

³⁷ *Process* 1:10.

humble, kind, and loving towards her sisters. Before she became ill, Sister Pacifica testified, Clare washed the feet of the sisters and gave them water with her own hands.³⁸ Sister Benvenuta recounted the delightful story of a time when Clare was washing the feet of a serving sister and leaned over to kiss her feet. The serving sister pulled her foot away accidentally hitting Clare in the mouth.³⁹ Sister Filippa added the detail that Clare did not desist from her attempt, but rather persevered in kissing the sole of the sister's foot.⁴⁰ Sister Agnes stated that this incident happened on a Thursday during Lent.⁴¹ Sister Cecilia confirmed that Clare was most solicitous about serving her sisters, humbly submitting herself to them.⁴² Agnes added that once, after Clare had washed Agnes's feet, that she insisted that Agnes drink the water. Agnes obediently did so, and found that it was so sweet and delicious that she could hardly drink it. When asked if any other sister had drunk this water, Agnes replied that Clare immediately threw it away so that no one else could taste it.⁴³

Sister Cecilia testified that Clare exhibited spiritual joy with her sisters. At times, when it was needed, she diligently corrected them, but she was never upset and treated her sisters with meekness and kindness.⁴⁴ Sister Lucia stated that she tried to please God and teach her sisters to love God. She had compassion for both the bodies and souls of her sisters.⁴⁵

Concerning the humility of Clare, Benvenuta stated that Clare performed the most degrading tasks in the monastery herself rather than assigning them to the other sisters.⁴⁶ In her love for her sisters, she went through the dormitory at night and covered her sisters from the cold.⁴⁷ Sister Filippa stressed Clare's efforts to be the servant of all by serving the sisters water, washing the commodes of the sick sisters with her own hands, and washing the feet of the serving sisters.⁴⁸

³⁸ *Process* 1:12.

³⁹ *Process* 2:3.

⁴⁰ *Process* 3:9.

⁴¹ *Process* 10:6.

⁴² *Process* 6:2.

⁴³ *Process* 10:11.

⁴⁴ *Process* 6:4.

⁴⁵ *Process* 8:3.

⁴⁶ *Process* 2:1.

⁴⁷ *Process* 2:3.

⁴⁸ *Process* 3:9.

Sister Filippa stated that Clare's speech concerned the things of God, and that she never gave her tongue or her ears to the affairs of the world.⁴⁹ She always rejoiced in the Lord and was never upset, so that her life seemed totally angelic.⁵⁰ Confirming Sister Filippa's testimony, Sister Amata affirmed that Clare exhibited the most perfect virginity, kindness, meekness, humility, and compassion toward her sisters and others. According to Sister Amata, Clare had governed the monastery for almost forty-three years and, even while she was still living, was considered holy by all who knew her. Even during her illness, she never wanted to depart from anything of the Order. She loved her sisters as herself, and the sisters held her in reverence as a saint and mother of the entire Order both during her life and after her death.⁵¹

Sister Cristiana testified that she believed that Clare was full of grace, virtue, and their holy operations. She stated that everything that could be said about the holiness of a woman, besides the Virgin Mary, could be said about Clare.⁵² Taking this cue, Sister Balvina, who was Clare's niece, testified that, except for the Virgin Mary, no other woman was holier than Clare. When asked how she knew this, Balvina reported that she had heard about the sanctity of other women saints through their legends, but she had seen the sanctity of Clare's life. Balvina was especially impressed by Clare's humility, kindness, patience, and her great abstinences that seemed impossible for a human being to perform.⁵³

Within the monastery, Clare was particularly tender with those who were suffering spiritual anguish. When a sister suffered from trial or temptation, Sister Agnes testified that Clare would call the sister in private and console her with tears, sometimes even throwing herself at her feet. Sister Agnes claimed that Sister Illuminata, who had since died, had told Agnes that Clare had done this for her.⁵⁴

Sister Benvenuta of Assisi testified that she had lived in the monastery for twenty-nine years under the direction of Clare. During this time, Clare taught her three things: 1) to love God above all else; 2) to

⁴⁹ *Process* 3:3.

⁵⁰ *Process* 3:6.

⁵¹ *Process* 4:17.

⁵² *Process* 5:2.

⁵³ *Process* 7:11.

⁵⁴ *Process* 10:5.

confess her sins totally and frequently; and 3) to have the Lord's passion always in her memory.⁵⁵

Sister Angeluccia stated that once after Easter, when Clare heard the *Vidi Aquam* being sung, she was overjoyed and kept it in mind. After Compline, she had the blessed water given to her and her sisters and said to them: "My sisters and daughters, always remember and recall this blessed water that came from the right side of our Lord Jesus Christ as he hung on the cross." Angeluccia also said that when Clare sent the serving sisters outside the monastery, she reminded them to praise God whenever they saw beautiful trees, flowers, and bushes, and to praise God for and in all things whenever they encountered people and creatures.⁵⁶

Sister Benvenuta testified that when Assisi was at war, some Saracens scaled the monastery wall and climbed into the yard. Clare, who was seriously ill at the time, got up from bed and called her sisters encouraging them not to be afraid. She prayed, and the Saracens departed.⁵⁷ Regarding the same incident, Sister Filippa testified that the sisters were deeply frightened by the Saracens and other enemies of God and the church. Clare comforted the sisters telling them that if God was with them, the enemy could not harm them. Encouraging them to have confidence in Jesus Christ because he would certainly save them, Clare assured the sisters that she would offer herself as a hostage to the Saracens so that they would not defile them. When she prayed, the Saracens departed without doing any harm or touching the monastery.⁵⁸ Sister Francesca added that when the Saracens entered the enclosure of the monastery, Clare asked the sisters to place her at the entrance of the refectory and to bring her the small pyx that held the Blessed Sacrament. Throwing herself prostrate on the ground in prayer, she begged God with tears, saying among other things: "Lord, look after these servants of yours, because I cannot protect them." Sister Francesca said that she then heard a voice responding with a wonderful sweetness: "I will always defend you!" Then, Sister Francesca testified, Clare also prayed for Assisi, and Francesca heard the answer: "The city will endure many dangers, but it will be defended."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Process* 11:2.

⁵⁶ *Process* 14:8–9.

⁵⁷ *Process* 2:20.

⁵⁸ *Process* 3:18.

⁵⁹ *Process* 9:2.

The officials asked Francesca when this happened, and she remembered only that she thought it was on a Friday at nine o'clock in September. She stated that the sisters who were at prayer were present, but that only she and Sister Illuminata of Pisa, who had since died, heard the voice because they were holding Clare up. Clare called both of them that evening and asked them not to tell anyone about the voice while she was alive.⁶⁰

Sister Agnes added the detail that when Clare prayed for the monastery and the city of Assisi that she prayed with tears, with her hands joined, and her eyes raised to heaven.⁶¹ Clare's blood sister, Sister Beatrice, stated that after Clare prayed the Saracens left the monastery without harming anyone or the monastery, and departed the city of Assisi the following day.⁶² Sister Cristiana, the daughter of Sir Bernardo da Suppo of Assisi, stated that she was the one who, at Clare's command, called the sisters to remain at prayer.⁶³ The *Legend of Clare* develops the political context of the episode at S. Damiano asserting that it was at the order of Frederick II that soldiers and Saracen archers depopulated the villages of Spoleto and spoiled its cities.⁶⁴

CARE FOR THE SICK SISTERS

In regard to those who became ill in the Monastery of S. Damiano, Sister Pacifica stated that Clare had compassion for the sick and even washed their commodes.⁶⁵ Sister Cecilia added that at times these were full of vermin and claimed that Clare had said that she did not smell any odor from them but rather a good fragrance.⁶⁶ Sister Benvenuta of Perugia also testified that Clare cleaned the toilets of the sick sisters with her own hands.⁶⁷

Clare often blessed her sick sisters with the sign of the cross. Sister Filippa stated that the Lord had given Clare so much grace that the S. Damiano sisters were cured when Clare made the sign of the

⁶⁰ *Process* 9:2.

⁶¹ *Process* 10:9.

⁶² *Process* 12:8.

⁶³ *Process* 13:9.

⁶⁴ *LegCl* 21.

⁶⁵ *Process* 1:12.

⁶⁶ *Process* 6:7.

⁶⁷ *Process* 2:1.

cross over them.⁶⁸ Sister Pacifica claimed that once when she had a terrible sickness that made her shriek, run a high fever, and tremble, Clare made the sign of the cross and cured her. This happened before Clare's own illness.⁶⁹ Sister Benvenuta of Perugia said that she lost her voice for almost two years and could hardly speak. On the vigil of the Assumption of Mary, she dreamt that Clare made the sign of the cross over her and cured her. On the feast, Clare did make the sign of the cross over her, and she was cured.⁷⁰

Sister Benvenuta of Perugia reported still another case of Clare's healing with the sign of the cross involving Sister Benvenuta, daughter of Lady Diambra of Assisi, who had been seriously ill with an infection under her arm.⁷¹ Sister Amata added that Sister Benvenuta of Assisi had had this infection for about eleven years and stated that five fingers could be placed in the fistula under her arm that had three growths coming out of it.⁷² Sister Filippa stated that this infection had lasted twelve years and that Clare recited the Our Father as the prayer.⁷³ Sister Benvenuta of Assisi herself testified that she had suffered for twelve years with infections under her arm and breast. One night, she went to Clare weeping and asking her for help. According to Benvenuta, Clare rose from her bed and prayed on her knees to God. When she finished her prayer, she turned toward Benvenuta and made the sign of the cross first on herself and then over Benvenuta, said the Our Father, and touched Benvenuta's wounds with her hand. With this, Benvenuta was healed of those infections that had seemed to be incurable. Benvenuta testified that this happened two years before in September, and that she never suffered from this infection again.⁷⁴

Sister Benvenuta of Perugia testified that when Sister Andrea was suffering from boils in her throat, she squeezed her throat so tightly out of pain that she was unable to call for help. Clare, sensing that something was wrong, sent a sister to comfort and assist her.⁷⁵ Sister Filippa elaborated on this story saying that Sister Andrea was tempted by her desire for a cure and was sleeping downstairs from Clare in the

⁶⁸ *Process* 3:6.

⁶⁹ *Process* 1:16.

⁷⁰ *Process* 2:13.

⁷¹ *Process* 2:16.

⁷² *Process* 4:8.

⁷³ *Process* 3:10.

⁷⁴ *Process* 11:1.

⁷⁵ *Process* 2:23.

dormitory. Knowing through the Spirit that something was wrong, Clare asked Filippa, who slept near her, to go and give Sister Andrea a boiled egg to swallow. When Andrea recovered her speech, Filippa brought her to Clare. Andrea did not want to tell Clare what happened, so Clare recounted the incident in detail to her.⁷⁶ Sister Balvina reported that Clare had also made the sign of the cross over Sister Benvenuta of Perugia when she had lost her voice. When asked how she knew about this, she said that she had heard the story from Sister Benvenuta.⁷⁷

Sister Filippa testified that once when Sister Amata was seriously ill for a long time with dropsy, fever, and a seriously distended stomach, Clare made the sign of the cross over her and touched her. On the next day she was permanently cured of this illness.⁷⁸ Sister Amata confirmed Sister Filippa's story, stating that she had been seriously ill for thirteen months with dropsy, fever, a cough, a distended stomach, and pain in her side. When an investigator asked Amata what Clare had said before she was cured, Amata stated that Clare placed her hand over her and asked God if it were best for her soul to be cured of these illnesses. At this, she was instantly and permanently cured.⁷⁹

Sister Filippa reported that Clare had also healed Sister Cristiana of a long-term deafness in one ear.⁸⁰ Sister Amata testified that Sister Cristiana had been deaf in this ear even before she had entered the monastery.⁸¹ Concerning this, Sister Cristiana stated that she had been deaf in one ear for a long time and had used many medicines that failed to bring relief. About one year before Clare's death, either in June or July, Clare made the sign of the cross on her head and touched her ear. With this, her ear was opened and she was able to hear very well.⁸²

Sister Amata told the story of Sister Cecilia who had a serious cough that overcame her whenever she began to eat so that she would almost suffocate. One Friday, Clare gave her a little cake to eat. Although fearful, Sister Cecilia obeyed, ate it, and never suffered from this cough again.⁸³

⁷⁶ *Process* 3:16.

⁷⁷ *Process* 7:7.

⁷⁸ *Process* 3:11.

⁷⁹ *Process* 4:7.

⁸⁰ *Process* 3:17.

⁸¹ *Process* 4:10.

⁸² *Process* 5:1.

⁸³ *Process* 4:9.

Sister Balvina testified that twelve years previously she had been ill with a terrible pain in her thigh. When Balvina complained to Clare about her suffering, Clare threw herself directly on the thigh and placed the veil she had on her head over it. According to Balvina, the pain immediately left her. Balvina stated that this happened while she was alone with Clare in the room where Clare usually prayed. Balvina also stated that about twenty years previously she had also been cured of a persistent fever and an abscess on her right breast that was so serious the sisters believed that she would die.⁸⁴

Sister Francesca reported that she had suffered for about six years with an illness that made her cry a great deal and took away her memory. When she felt she was going to die from this condition, she made a vow to Clare. After this, she was completely cured of this illness.⁸⁵

WORK

Even when Clare was ill and unable to get out of bed, Pacifica testified, she had herself raised and supported by pillows so that she could spin thread. From her spinning, cloth was made so that the sisters could sew corporals and altar linens for nearly all the churches on the plains and hills around Assisi. These goods were hand-delivered to the priests of these churches by the Franciscan brothers.⁸⁶ Sister Benvenuta added that Clare had paper boxes lined with silk made to hold these corporals and had them blessed by the bishop.⁸⁷

Sister Cecilia confirmed that Clare never wanted to be idle, and that even during the time of her final illness, she made herself rise, sit up in bed, and spin. The soft cloth made by her spinning was used to make many corporals and the cases to hold them were covered with silk or precious cloth. She sent them to the bishop of Assisi who blessed them, before sending them to the churches in the diocese of Assisi. Cecilia believed that they had been given to every church.⁸⁸ Sister Francesca added that she had counted fifty sets that were distributed to the churches.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *Process* 7:12–13.

⁸⁵ *Process* 9:7.

⁸⁶ *Process* 1:11.

⁸⁷ *Process* 2:12.

⁸⁸ *Process* 6:14.

⁸⁹ *Process* 9:9.

THE "PRIVILEGE OF POVERTY"

The sisters were particularly concerned to speak with the interrogators regarding Clare's efforts to obtain the "privilege of poverty" for S. Damiano. Sister Pacifica testified that Clare particularly loved poverty, and refused to desire or accept any possessions either personally or for the monastery. Pope Gregory IX, himself, wanted to give her many things and buy possessions for the S. Damiano monastery, but Clare refused.⁹⁰ Sister Benvenuta added that both Pope Gregory and the bishop of Ostia, who later became Pope Alexander IV, wanted to give Clare possessions, but Clare would not consent. Clare had sold her inheritance and given it to the poor, and even when Pope Gregory came personally to the monastery to convince Clare to accept possessions, Clare refused his offer.⁹¹ Sister Filippa agreed that Clare had sold her inheritance and had given it to the poor⁹² and that she could never be persuaded by the pope or the bishop of Ostia to receive any possessions. She revered the "privilege of poverty" that she had received and kept it most diligently because she feared she might lose it.⁹³

Before Clare died, according to Filippa, she called all her sisters together and entrusted the "privilege of poverty" to them. Her great desire was to have the *forma vitae* of the Order confirmed with a papal bull, to be able to place her lips upon the papal seal of this bull, and then die the following day. This occurred exactly as she had desired.⁹⁴

Sister Cristiana, the daughter of Sir Bernardo da Suppo of Assisi, stated that the sisters believed that Clare, who on earth so fervently protected her sisters, their religious life, and their promise of poverty, was in heaven praying for them.⁹⁵ She also stated that during her sickness, Clare never stopped praising God, reminding the sisters of the perfect observance of the Order, and most especially, the love of poverty.⁹⁶

The author of the *Legend of Clare* added that, through frequent talks, Clare taught her sisters that their monastery would be acceptable to God only when it was rich in poverty, and that it would be secure only

⁹⁰ *Process* 1:13.

⁹¹ *Process* 2:22.

⁹² *Process* 3:31.

⁹³ *Process* 3:14.

⁹⁴ *Process* 3:32.

⁹⁵ *Process* 13:3.

⁹⁶ *Process* 13:10.

when fortified by the strong watchtower of the most exalted poverty. She encouraged them to be conformed to the poor Christ whom a poor mother placed as an infant in a crude crib.⁹⁷

According to the *Legend*, Clare asked for the “privilege of poverty” from Innocent III desiring that her Order be known by the title of poverty. Innocent, congratulating Clare’s exemplary fervor, spoke of the uniqueness of her proposal since the apostolic see had never before given such a privilege. The *Legend of Clare* claimed that Innocent wrote the first draft of this privilege with his own hand. Later, when Gregory IX ascended to the papal throne, he attempted to persuade Clare that, because of the current events and the dangers of the world, she should consent to accept some possessions, which he himself was willing to give. When she resolutely resisted and would in no way acquiesce, the pope replied, “If you fear for your vow, We absolve you from it.” Clare, in turn, responded, “Holy Father, I have absolutely no desire ever to be absolved from the following of Christ.”⁹⁸

Also, according to the *Legend*, when the cardinal of Ostia heard of Clare’s final illness, he hurried to Assisi from Perugia to visit her. After he had given Clare communion and preached to the sisters, Clare begged him with tears to petition to have the “privilege of poverty” confirmed by the pope and cardinals. The cardinal promised Clare that he would do this and, in fact, solicited and received the requested confirmation.⁹⁹

MONASTIC GOVERNANCE

In regard to the regular observance of her Order and the governance of her sisters, Pacifica stated that Clare carefully guarded monastic order as someone might safeguard a temporal treasure.¹⁰⁰ Three years after Clare’s conversion, Pacifica stated that Clare, at the insistence of Francis, accepted the direction and governance of the sisters.¹⁰¹

The author of the *Legend of Clare* obviously asked for further information regarding Clare’s acceptance of monastic governance.

⁹⁷ *LegCl* 13.

⁹⁸ *LegCl* 14.

⁹⁹ *LegCl* 40.

¹⁰⁰ *Process* 1:14.

¹⁰¹ *Process* 1:6.

According to the *Legend*, Clare declined the name and office of abbess, wishing to be a servant to her sisters, but three years after her conversion, compelled by Francis, she accepted the government of the sisters. Her attitude toward this office was the acceptance of an even more profound sense of service. As abbess, she performed familial chores, washed the hands of the sisters, served those seated at table, and waited on those who were eating. She rarely gave an order, but instead did what was needed spontaneously, preferring to do things herself rather than to command her sisters. She washed the commodes of the sick neither turning away from their filth nor shrinking from their stench.¹⁰²

FRIARS MINOR AT S. DAMIANO

We see in Clare's process of canonization a lived picture of the involvement the Franciscan brothers had with the S. Damiano monastery. The brothers played a pivotal role in begging for the needs of the sisters, keeping the monastery in basic repair, and providing the sisters with spiritual care. Sister Pacifica testified that once, during the summer of the second year that they had lived at S. Damiano, there was no oil in the monastery. To solve the problem, Clare called Brother Bentevenga, who begged for the sisters. When Brother Bentevenga requested a container to hold any oil he might obtain, Clare washed a jar with her own hands and placed it on a wall near the entrance of the house where the brother would find it. Brother Bentevenga came for the jar and found it filled with oil. He searched diligently, but could not find anyone who knew how the jar had been filled.¹⁰³

Witnesses in Clare's process of canonization attested also to Francis's presence at the S. Damiano monastery. Both Sister Pacifica and Sister Benvenuta testified that when Clare became ill from her abstinences, Francis came to S. Damiano with the bishop of Assisi and ordered her, in front of the other sisters, to eat something every day.¹⁰⁴ Benvenuta also testified that Francis had sent Brother Stephen, who was mentally ill, to the monastery so that Clare could make the sign of the cross over him. Clare signed him with the cross and then per-

¹⁰² *LegCl* 12.

¹⁰³ *Process* 1:15.

¹⁰⁴ *Process* 1:8; 2:8.

mitted Brother Stephen to take a nap in the place where she usually prayed. After he woke, he ate a little and then left cured.¹⁰⁵

Sister Filippa reported that when the begging brothers returned to S. Damiano after receiving whole loaves of bread as alms, Clare reproached them asking: "Who gave you these loaves of bread?" She did this because she preferred to receive broken loaves rather than whole ones.¹⁰⁶ Sister Cecilia reported that at another time, Clare divided a loaf of bread between the brothers and the sisters. Clare asked Sister Cecilia to make fifty slices out of the half loaf of bread and bring them to the sisters who were at table. Cecilia said to Clare: "The Lord's miracle of the five loaves and two fishes would be needed to make fifty slices out of that!" Clare insisted, and Cecilia found herself able to make fifty large slices from the half loaf.¹⁰⁷

Sister Cristiana reported that about seven years before in the month of July, during the Octave of S. Peter, a very heavy door fell on Clare. Sister Angeluccia of Spoleto shouted loudly fearing that Clare had been killed. Sister Cristiana and some other sisters ran and saw Clare beneath a door that was so heavy that three brothers could hardly lift it. Clare, however, claimed that it seemed that a mantle had been placed over her, and she suffered no harm.¹⁰⁸ Sister Cecilia confirmed Cristiana's story saying that she had also seen Clare while she was pinned under the door.¹⁰⁹ Sister Angeluccia stated that she had seen the door fall on Clare and that this occurred on a Sunday evening during the Octave of S. Peter.¹¹⁰ Sister Balvina of Porzano confirmed many of the same details regarding Clare's accident with the door.¹¹¹

Once when Clare was ill, Filippa reported, she was unable to rise from bed to go to chapel for Christmas Matins. When all the sisters went to Matins as usual and left Clare behind, Clare prayed, "Lord God, look, I have been left here alone with you." Immediately she began to hear the organ, responsories, and the Office of the brothers in the Church of S. Francis as if she were present.¹¹² Sister Amata confirmed this story, adding that Clare also saw the manger of Jesus

¹⁰⁵ *Process* 2:15.

¹⁰⁶ *Process* 3:13.

¹⁰⁷ *Process* 6:16.

¹⁰⁸ *Process* 5:5.

¹⁰⁹ *Process* 6:17.

¹¹⁰ *Process* 14:6.

¹¹¹ *Process* 15:2.

¹¹² *Process* 3:30.

Christ.¹¹³ Sister Balvina contributed the touching detail that Clare said to her sisters: “You left me here alone after going to the chapel to hear Matins, but the Lord has taken good care of me, because I was not able to rise from my bed.”¹¹⁴

Sister Agnes reported that Clare took great delight in hearing the Word of God. Even though she had never studied letters, she willingly listened to learned sermons. Once when one of the Lesser Brothers, Philip of Atri, was preaching, Agnes saw a handsome young boy, about three years old, appear to Clare through most of the sermon. While Agnes was praying in her heart asking God that she not be deceived, God answered her saying: “I am in their midst.” According to Sister Agnes, this had happened twenty-one years previously during the week after Easter when the “I am the Good Shepherd is sung.” During this time, according to Agnes, it seemed as though there was a great brilliance around Clare, not like a material light, but like the brilliance of the stars. Sister Agnes also reported that she smelled an indescribable sweetness during the vision, and that after this, she saw another brilliance that was not the color of the first, but rather a kind of red that seemed to emit sparks of fire that covered Clare’s entire head. In her mind, Sister Agnes heard the words, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.”¹¹⁵

The *Legend* states that once, when Pope Gregory forbade any brother to go to the women’s monasteries without permission, Clare, grieving that her sisters would have the food of sacred teaching more rarely said: “Let him now take away from us all the brothers since he has taken away those who provide us with the food that is vital.” With this, she sent back to the minister general all the brothers, not wanting to keep those who begged for corporal bread if the sisters could not also retain the Franciscan chaplains and welcome Franciscan preachers. When Gregory IX heard this, he immediately delegated decisions concerning the pastoral care of the sisters to the minister general.¹¹⁶

When Clare was dying, according to the *Legend of Clare*, she requested that the priests and brothers of the Friars Minor read to her the Passion of the Lord and other holy words. When Brother Juniper came to see her, Clare asked him if he had anything new from the

¹¹³ *Process* 4:16.

¹¹⁴ *Process* 7:9.

¹¹⁵ *Process* 10:8.

¹¹⁶ *LegCl* 37.

Lord. When he spoke, Clare was especially consoled. Also, at Clare's bedside were Brothers Angelo and Leo,¹¹⁷ along with her blood sister, Agnes, who wept uncontrollably. According to the *Legend*, Clare assured Agnes that she would soon follow her in death.¹¹⁸

Sister Filippa testified that when Clare was very close to death, she learned that a brother had come with letters bearing the papal seal. She reverently took the papal bull and pressed the seal to her mouth in order to kiss it. Clare died on the following day.¹¹⁹

ENCLOSURE AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER MONASTERIES

After Sister Benvenuta had told the story of Brother Stephen's mental illness and subsequent cure, the commission asked her if she had knowledge concerning Brother Stephen's prior condition, how long he had been ill, and whether or not his cure was permanent. Sister Benvenuta testified that she did not know these things because she was enclosed. Once Brother Stephen was cured, he went on his way.¹²⁰

After she had testified concerning the cure of a young boy with a film over his eyes, Sister Amata was asked by the officials how long the boy had suffered from this condition. Sister Amata responded that she had only seen the boy when he was brought to the monastery. She had never seen him before or after he left the monastery because she had always remained enclosed.¹²¹

There is testimony given in Clare's process of canonization that the sisters of the Monastery of S. Damiano were sent at times to help in the formation and guidance of other monastic communities. Sister Pacifica stated that she had lived for a time at the Monastery of Vallegloria in Spello to help with the formation of the sisters.¹²² Sister Balvina stated that Clare had sent her to the monastery of Arezzo along with a lady who had been sent there for one year and five months.¹²³

¹¹⁷ *LegCl* 45.

¹¹⁸ *LegCl* 43.

¹¹⁹ *Process* 3:32.

¹²⁰ *Process* 2:15.

¹²¹ *Process* 4:11.

¹²² *Process* 1:14.

¹²³ *Process* 7:11.

THE SISTERS OF S. DAMIANO

The sisters of S. Damiano shored up the veracity of their testimonies by providing details concerning their own lives. Sister Pacifica stated that she had entered S. Damiano at the same time as Clare.¹²⁴ According to Pacifica, the episode regarding Brother Bentevenga's jar of oil happened during the summer of their second year at S. Damiano and besides Clare and Pacifica, Clare's blood sister, Agnes, Sister Balvina, and Sister Benvenuta lived in the monastery at the time.¹²⁵ Sister Benvenuta claimed that she had entered S. Damiano the same year as Clare; Clare had entered on Holy Monday, and Benvenuta joined her in September.¹²⁶

Sister Filippa, daughter of Lord Leonardo di Ghislerio, told the investigators that she had entered S. Damiano four years after Clare. While Clare had entered through the preaching of Francis, Filippa was moved after Clare described to her how Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross for the salvation of all. Filippa was with Clare at S. Damiano for thirty-eight years.¹²⁷

Sister Amata stated that she entered S. Damiano because of the admonition and exhortation of Clare. Clare had asked the Lord to give Amata, who was her niece, special grace so that she would not be deceived by the world nor remain in it. Amata was with Clare at S. Damiano about twenty-five years.¹²⁸ Sister Cristiana stated that she had entered S. Damiano less than seven years ago, but gave no other details.¹²⁹ Sister Cecilia testified that she entered S. Damiano three years after Clare because of the preaching of Francis and the exhortation of Clare and Brother Philip. She was with Clare at S. Damiano for forty years.¹³⁰

Sister Cecilia testified that once Francis had sent five women to be received into the Monastery of S. Damiano. Clare said that she would receive four of them, but insisted that she did not want to receive the fifth because she would not persevere in the monastery. She did receive her because of great pressure, but the woman hardly stayed

¹²⁴ *Process* 1:3.

¹²⁵ *Process* 1:15.

¹²⁶ *Process* 2:1.

¹²⁷ *Process* 3:1.

¹²⁸ *Process* 4:1.

¹²⁹ *Process* 5:4.

¹³⁰ *Process* 6:1.

six months. Although she had not witnessed this event, Sister Cecilia stated that Sister Agnes, Clare's blood sister who had died a short time after Clare, had witnessed this.¹³¹

Sister Lucia of Rome could not remember how long she had lived in the monastery, since Clare had received her for the love of God when she was very little.¹³² Sister Agnes also testified that she had entered S. Damiano as a young girl and had remained in the monastery for thirty-three years.¹³³ Sister Benvenuta of Lady Diambra, who had lived with Clare at the S. Damiano monastery for twenty-nine years,¹³⁴ testified that Clare was extraordinarily thoughtful and discerning in her direction of the monastery and the sisters.¹³⁵

The third and youngest daughter of Clare's family, Sister Beatrice, stated that she had lived with Clare in the monastery for twenty-four years¹³⁶ and testified that while Clare was abbess, she had directed the sisters of S. Damiano in a holy and prudent manner.¹³⁷ Sister Cristiana, the daughter of Sir Bernardo da Suppo of Assisi, testified that she had entered the monastery thirty-four years previously during the month of May. Most especially, she remembered, Clare was thoroughly inflamed with charity; she truly loved her sisters as herself. If she heard anything that was not pleasing to God, she would try to correct it with deep compassion and without delay.¹³⁸

Sister Angeluccia testified that she had lived at the Monastery of S. Damiano for twenty-eight years. When she had entered the monastery, Clare was already ill; nevertheless, Clare rose from her bed during the night and kept vigil in prayer with many tears. She did the same thing in the morning about the hour of Terce.¹³⁹

The *Legend of Clare* adds the dramatic saga of Clare's blood sister, Catherine. Clare prayed that God would inspire her sister to the service of God. Sixteen days after Clare's conversion, Catherine escaped to the Monastery of S. Angelo in Panzo and confided to Clare that she wished to serve God completely. The following day, after hearing that

¹³¹ *Process* 6:15.

¹³² *Process* 8:2.

¹³³ *Process* 10:1–2.

¹³⁴ *Process* 11:2.

¹³⁵ *Process* 11:5.

¹³⁶ *Process* 12:7.

¹³⁷ *Process* 12:6.

¹³⁸ *Process* 13:2–3.

¹³⁹ *Process* 14:1–2.

Catherine had joined Clare, twelve men, feigning a peaceful entrance, came to the monastery. Since Monaldo and his confreres had lost hope in Clare, they turned to Catherine and demanded that she return with them. When Catherine refused to leave, one of the knights came at her in a rage with kicks and blows and tried to drag her off by the hair, while the others pushed her and lifted her in their arms. Catherine screamed, "Dear sister, help me! Do not let me be taken from Christ the Lord!" The thugs dragged Catherine along the slope of the mountain, ripping her clothes, and strewing the path with the hair they had torn out. Clare prostrated herself in prayer with tears for her sister.

Suddenly, according to the *Legend*, Catherine's body became so heavy that the twelve men were not able to carry her beyond a certain stream. Even with the help of others coming from the fields and vineyards, they could not raise her from the ground. They shrugged off the situation mocking that she must have been eating lead all night. When her enraged uncle, Monaldo, tried to strike her a lethal blow, a piercing pain suddenly struck his raised hand; he suffered from this pain a long time after this. Clare came to the place and asked her relatives to give up the conflict and to entrust her half-dead sister to her care. When they departed, Catherine rose cheerfully and gave herself perpetually to divine service. Francis tonsured her with his own hand and directed both Catherine and Clare in the way of the Lord.¹⁴⁰

S. DAMIANO IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Sister Benvenuta testified that she was once with Clare when she heard that a person in the world did something contrary to God's will. Clare wept, reproached the person, and begged the person to do penance.¹⁴¹ Benvenuta also told the story of a toddler, about three or four years old, who had pushed a pebble up one of his nostrils in such a way that no one could extricate it. When the boy was brought to Clare, she made the sign of the cross over him and the pebble immediately fell from his nose.¹⁴² The *Legend of Clare* adds that the boy's name was Mattiolo from Spoleto.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ *LegCl* 24–26.

¹⁴¹ *Process* 2:10.

¹⁴² *Process* 2:18.

¹⁴³ *LegCl* 33.

Sister Filippa told the story of a young boy, the son of Lord Giovanni di Maestro Giovanni of Assisi, the procurator of the sisters, who was seriously ill with a fever. When Clare heard of the youngster's plight, she touched the boy and made the sign of the cross over him. His father told the sisters that his son was immediately healed of his fever.¹⁴⁴ Sister Francesca added that the boy had both a fever and scrofula, and that she later heard his father say in the parlor that the boy was instantly cured. Francesca reported that she had seen the five-year old boy a little later when he was at the monastery.¹⁴⁵

Sister Amata testified concerning a young boy from Perugia who had a film that covered his entire eye. He was brought to Clare, and Clare touched the boy's eyes and made the sign of the cross over him. She then asked that the boy be brought to Sister Ortolana, Clare's mother who was in the S. Damiano monastery, so that she could also make the sign of the cross over him. After Clare's mother signed the child, the boy was cured. Clare claimed that her mother was responsible for the cure, while Ortolana attributed the cure to Clare.¹⁴⁶ Sister Amata also testified concerning a lady from Pisa who was freed of five demons about four or five years before through the merits of Clare. The demons had confessed that the prayers of Clare were burning them. Because of this confession, the lady came to the monastery to thank God and Clare.¹⁴⁷ Sister Balvina confirmed this story.¹⁴⁸

Once, according to Sister Fillipa, Vitalis d'Aversa had been sent by the emperor with a great army against the Assisi commune. Vitalis had pledged that he would not leave Assisi until he had conquered it. Clare responded by calling all the sisters together, covered her and her sister's unveiled heads with ashes, and commanded that they pray that the Lord would free the city. Clare learned the next day that Vitalis had left by night with his army.¹⁴⁹ The *Legend of Clare* adds that Vitalis was the captain of an imperial army who stripped the land of trees, devastated the entire countryside, and vowed to take possession of Assisi. Not only did he not fulfill this vow, but he died by the sword a short while after leaving Assisi.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ *Process* 3:15.

¹⁴⁵ *Process* 9:6.

¹⁴⁶ *Process* 4:11.

¹⁴⁷ *Process* 4:20.

¹⁴⁸ *Process* 7:14.

¹⁴⁹ *Process* 3:19.

¹⁵⁰ *LegCl* 23.

Sister Francesca testified to this same episode adding more details. She noted that when Clare heard the rumor that the city of Assisi would be defeated by Vitalis d'Aversa, she called her sisters and said to them: "We have received many benefits from this city and I know we must pray that God will protect it." She then asked them to return in the morning for some time with her. The next morning, the sisters came, and Clare asked them to bring her some ashes. She took all the coverings off her head and asked her sisters to do the same. Then, taking the ashes, she placed a large amount on her head as if she had been newly tonsured, and did this also on the heads of her sisters. She then asked them to go and pray in the chapel. D'Aversa's army was defeated and left Assisi the following morning. That day, the sisters abstained and fasted on bread and water and some ate nothing.¹⁵¹

Clare's involvement in the larger community included even the papacy itself. The *Legend of Clare* states that Pope Gregory IX requested Clare's prayers during times of difficulty both when he was the bishop of Ostia and later while he served as pope. He would request Clare's assistance by letter and relied upon her help.¹⁵²

CLARE'S ILLNESS AND DEATH

Sister Pacifica testified that Clare's illness had lasted for twenty-nine years,¹⁵³ which means that Clare became ill about the age of thirty. Sister Francesca contributed a delightful story that detailed a dilemma during Clare's illness when she wanted a certain towel, but was too ill to get out of bed. Because no one was with her at the time to bring it to her, a little cat in the monastery began to pull and drag the towel toward her. When Clare scolded the cat for dragging it on the ground, the cat began to roll the towel so that it would not touch the floor. When asked how she knew about this, Francesca replied that Clare had told her the story.¹⁵⁴

Sister Filippa testified that on the Friday night when Clare was near death, she said: "Go calmly in peace, for you will have a good escort, because the one who has created you has sent you the Holy Spirit and

¹⁵¹ *Process* 9:3.

¹⁵² *LegCl* 27.

¹⁵³ *Process* 1:17.

¹⁵⁴ *Process* 9:8.

has always guarded you as a mother does her child who loves her.” She then said: “O Lord, may you who have created me, be blessed!” She also said many things concerning the Trinity, but she whispered these things so softly that the sisters could not understand her.¹⁵⁵ Sister Angeluccia testified that a few days before her death, Clare spoke to the Trinity and said very softly other words to God that many educated people would hardly understand.¹⁵⁶ Filippa testified that she asked one of the sisters who was at Clare’s bedside with her to remember what Clare was saying. Clare responded telling the sisters that they would remember only what God wanted them to retain.¹⁵⁷

A few days before Clare died, Filippa testified, Pope Innocent IV came to the monastery to visit her. Clare spoke of the blessing of receiving the Eucharist and seeing Christ’s vicar on the same day.¹⁵⁸ The *Legend of Clare* states that Innocent IV had been in Lyons, but when he arrived in Perugia and heard of the gravity of Clare’s illness, he hurried to see her. Entering the monastery, Innocent went to Clare’s bed and extended his hand so that she might kiss it. After kissing his hand, Clare also asked to kiss the pope’s foot. The pope, graciously placed his foot on a wooden stool, and Clare kissed it on the top and bottom. Clare then asked the pope to forgive her of her sins and the pope responded, “Would that my need of pardon was such as yours!” He gave her absolution and his apostolic blessing.¹⁵⁹

Sister Amata testified that on the Friday before Clare died, she asked Amata who was alone with her: “Did you see the King of Glory whom I saw?” Clare said this a few times and died a few days later.¹⁶⁰ Sister Agnes testified that when Clare was dying, she admonished Agnes and the other sisters to pray. In response to this request, Agnes said that she said the *Prayer of the Five Wounds of the Lord*, and Clare, as though she was able to understand, softly kept the passion of Jesus Christ on her lips. According to Agnes, the last words that Clare spoke to her were, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his holy ones.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ *Process* 3:20.

¹⁵⁶ *Process* 14:7.

¹⁵⁷ *Process* 3:21.

¹⁵⁸ *Process* 3:24.

¹⁵⁹ *LegCl* 41–42.

¹⁶⁰ *Process* 4:19.

¹⁶¹ *Process* 10:10.

Sister Benvenuta of Lady Dimabra of Assisi reported that from Friday evening until Saturday, the third day before Clare died, she sat near the bed of Clare with other sisters who were crying over the passing of their mother. During this time, Clare said: "Go in peace, because you will have a good escort. The one who created you has already provided for you by being holy, has infused the Holy Spirit in you, and has guarded you as a mother does her littlest child." When Sister Anastasia asked Clare to whom she was speaking, Clare replied: "I am speaking to my blessed soul."¹⁶² Sister Filippa had also testified regarding these words that Clare spoke to Anastasia.¹⁶³

While contemplating the extraordinary holiness of Clare at Clare's bedside, it seemed to Sister Benvenuta of Assisi as though the heavenly court was busy preparing to honor her, and that the Blessed Virgin Mary herself was preparing special garments for the new saint. While lost in these thoughts, Benvenuta saw a great multitude of virgins, all dressed in white with crowns on their heads, entering through the door of the room where Clare lay. Among these virgins, one was beautiful beyond description, and had a crown on her head that was larger than the others. Above this crown she had a golden cluster, like a thurible, from which radiated a brilliance that seemed to illuminate the entire monastery. When these virgins approached Clare's bed, the virgin who seemed greater covered her bed with such a fine and delicate cloth so that even though Clare was covered, it was still possible to see her through the cloth's elegant transparency. Then the preeminent virgin inclined her face above the breast of Clare so that Benvenuta could not discern one from the other. When asked if she was awake during this vision, Benvenuta testified that she was awake. When asked who was present, she replied that there were other sisters, some of whom were sleeping and others awake. Sister Benvenuta did not know if they had seen what she did, since she had never revealed this vision until giving her testimony. When asked what day this happened, Benvenuta testified that it occurred on Friday evening and that Clare died the following Monday.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² *Process* 11:3.

¹⁶³ *Process* 3:22.

¹⁶⁴ *Process* 11:4.

CONCLUSION

The sense one has from a careful reading of Clare's process of canonization is of a group of sisters who depended on the services of their Franciscan brothers, and who were, although enclosed, beloved by many in the Spoleto valley. The sisters valued contemplation focused on the life of Christ, and a virtuous living characterized by silence, generosity, love for the poor, and sacrifice. Most importantly, Clare's monastery was defined by mutual care and kindness. Clare truly loved her sisters; and her sisters truly loved Clare.

Clare's life as a penitential woman is confirmed by her simple and persevering prayer, her humble participation in the church's sacramental life, her assiduous fasts, and the physical hardships such as the infamous hair shirts and crude bedding she imposed on herself. While the sisters relate some visions relative to meditations on various gospel mysteries, they point out that the most important fruit of Clare's prayer was the words of consolation and guidance that she was able to give her sisters. The sisters of S. Damiano prayed the Liturgy of the Hours as well as devotional prayers. Their lives were marked by the seasons and they marked the events of their lives according to liturgical feasts.

Healing at the Monastery of S. Damiano was done through compassion and prayer. The sisters certainly had faith in the power of Clare's sign of the cross, and were frequently healed by Clare in this way. In addition, Clare was solicitous toward the sick and did everything possible to comfort and care for them.

Perhaps most remarkable were Clare's everyday virtues. Clare, although abbess, considered herself the servant of all. She washed the feet and cleaned the commodes of the sick, and covered her sisters at night from the cold. She did not shy away from gently correcting those in need of amendment, and diligently tried to follow her *forma vitae* even during her illness. She resisted being drawn into worldly affairs and anxiety, and rejoiced always in the Lord. Yet, she was a woman of courage, challenging familial knights, popes, and Saracens alike.

Although their lives did not revolve around episcopal visits, Clare deeply respected church leaders. She did not allow this respect, however, to overshadow her responsibility as a leader of women and courageously countered even the pope himself when she felt her religious life threatened. Her dissent revolved around the coveted "privilege

of poverty” that Clare, and especially the first sisters who entered S. Damiano with her, defended as their most fundamental spiritual treasure.

Surrounded by her beloved sisters and friars, Clare died loving not only God and neighbor, but also, most profoundly and perhaps most rarely, her very soul. Her relationship with the Trinity had taught her to truly love God, self, and neighbor. Clare’s sisters, although terribly saddened, do not appear anxious. Clare had been ill for many years and they had learned to carry on. The mother who had taught, protected, and cared for them would continue to cherish them and would meet them again, as she had told Agnes of Prague, “at the throne of glory of the great God.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ 4LAg 39.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICS OF “INFANTS’ MILK” CLARE OF ASSISI AND THE PRIVILEGE OF POVERTY

There is a story in Clare’s canonization process that seems a bit out of place in light of Clare’s otherwise ordinary, medieval life. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Clare’s life at S. Damiano was focused mainly on love of God and neighbor. Nearly absent are extraordinary flights of rapture and ecstasy. The fruit of Clare’s prayer is simply exemplary works and good words for her sisters and those coming to the monastery for spiritual or temporal needs. If anything, Clare was known for her ability to heal, rather than for extraordinary gifts of prayer. While her prayer was intense, Clare focused on contemplating biblical mysteries rather than experimenting with altered states of consciousness.

It is Sister Filippa, a sister who had known Clare since childhood and had lived with Clare at S. Damiano for thirty-eight years, who introduces a vignette into her testimony before the commission for Clare’s process of canonization that seems to challenge the above observation. According to Filippa, Clare claimed to have seen herself in a vision effortlessly climbing a long staircase toward S. Francis in order to bring him a bowl of hot water and a towel for wiping his hands. When she reached Francis, the saint bared his breast and said, “Come, take, and drink.” After Clare had sucked from Francis’s breast, the saint admonished her to imbibe yet again. Clare related that what she tasted was indescribably sweet and satisfying, and that after she had drunk, the nipple of Francis’s breast remained between her lips. When she took the nipple out of her mouth and examined it, it seemed to be clear gold and so bright that everything could be seen in it as in a mirror.¹

¹ *Process* 3:93–98. Concerning this vignette see Alfonso Marini, “*Pauperem Christum, virgo pauper, amplectere*: Il punto su Chiara e Agnese di Boemia,” in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 121–32 (Galatina: Congedo, 1998); and Alfonso Marini, “La *forma vitae* di San Francesco per San Damiano tra Chiara d’Assisi, Agnese di Boemia ed interventi papali,” *Hagiographica* 4 (1997): 179–95.

Other sisters related this same story. The scribe noted that Sister Amata, Clare's niece who had lived with Clare at S. Damiano for twenty-five years, said the same as Sister Filippa concerning Clare's vision and the breast of S. Francis.² Sister Cecilia, one of Clare's first companions at S. Damiano who had lived with Clare for forty-three years, related the same vision as Sister Filippa, except that she did not remember the detail concerning the nipple of the breast that Clare held in her mouth.³ Sister Balvina, the blood sister of Sister Amata and a cousin of Clare who had lived with Clare for thirty-six years, stated that Clare had also related to her the vision of the breast of S. Francis as Sister Filippa had reported.⁴ Obviously Clare's sisters at S. Damiano felt that this vision and its telling were essential.

While one may be tempted to interpret this vision as an obvious example of sublimated erotic love erupting from Clare's subconscious, the episode must first be examined in its context.⁵ Visions concerning adult men and women drinking from each others breasts were, in fact, common in medieval religious jargon. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), a mystic of the Eastern church—and one must remember that the Roman church of Clare and Francis's age was actively influenced by the Greek church—stated that Christ comes to those who are spiritual infants appearing as a breast of light that is placed in the mouth of their intellects to suckle them.⁶ Christian iconography depicted the *Madonna lactans*, the nursing Madonna, as the virgin who nurtured Christ with the milk that fed his sacred body and blood. The image had obvious Eucharistic overtones and was linked in medieval art to mercy and active service to the poor.⁷ In his commentary on Benedict of Nursia's steps for humility, Bernard states that beginners cannot yet digest solid food and so are nourished in the meanwhile

² *Process* 4:51.

³ *Process* 6:37.

⁴ *Process* 7:10.

⁵ Concerning this point, see Jacques Dalarun, "Francis and Clare of Assisi: Differing Perspectives on Gender and Power," *FS* 63 (2005): 11–25.

⁶ Symeon the new Theologian, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, vol. 2, *On Virtue and Christian Life* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 20.

⁷ See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 269–79; and Rebecca Lynn Winter, "Conscripting the Breast: Lactation, Slavery and Salvation in the Realms of Aragon and Kingdom of Majorca, c. 1250–1300," *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 164–84.

with the milk of love instead of bread, and with oil instead of wine.⁸ In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen wrote to her nuns telling them that after her death, when they were no longer able to drink from the breast of their mother, they would speak with groans and tears saying: "Oh, how happy we would be to drink from our mother's breasts, if only she were here with us now!"⁹

Given this context, Clare's vision of suckling Francis's breast seems less peculiar. Yet, what does it mean and why does Sister Filippa, a leader in the S. Damiano monastery and a faithful follower of the ideals of S. Clare, bring it up? Why not let this story edify the nuns in the monastery, rather than risk misinterpretation by the papal commission? Certainly the story, even if not unusual, could be risky. Not everything that Clare did and experienced was disclosed to the papal investigators. Why did Sister Filippa and others choose to relate this particular detail of Clare's life?

My proposal is that the sisters' choice to describe Clare's vision to the papal investigators was a politically savvy one that fits into the context of S. Damiano's continual struggle to maintain the "privilege of poverty." When seen in this context, it can be demonstrated that the early companions of Clare used the opportunity of the papal investigation to fortify their claim to the "privilege of poverty" even after the death of Clare.

POVERTY AS THE FRANCISCAN VOCATION

Francis and Clare experienced their religious life as the scripture: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me (Matthew 19:21)." Both Francis and Clare came from wealthy families and decided to exchange earthly for heavenly wealth. The Franciscan agreement, in essence, was a simple one. Sell whatever you have, give it to the poor, be assured of treasure in heaven, and then live life following Jesus. Not to sell one's goods and give them to the poor was a deal-breaker. For Francis and Clare, selling what one had and giving it

⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 22.

⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 170.

to the poor was as essential a mandate to their religious genius as the discovery of “justification by faith alone” was for Luther.¹⁰ The earliest Franciscans understood poverty as the guarantee of heavenly life; with poverty there was certainty and a peaceful living of a religious journey.¹¹

After testing Clare to make sure that she could endure the hardships and contempt that poverty entails, Francis wrote a *forma vitae* for her and Clare’s sister, Agnes. In this *forma vitae*, Francis promised to have the same attentive care and special solicitude for the sisters as he did for his brothers. The Franciscan brothers did not have temporal resources to give the sisters at this early stage of the Order. The sisters would need to be content with the brothers’ loving care and solicitude. Signifying the centrality of Francis’s agreement with her in regard to her vocational identity, Clare archived the *forma vitae* that Francis gave her at the very center of her legislation:

Because by divine inspiration, you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the Most High King, the Father of the heavens, and have espoused yourselves to the Holy Spirit, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and my brothers always to have the same attentive care and special solicitude for you as for them.¹²

After the text that Francis gave her, Clare added the following note: “As long as he lived, he diligently fulfilled this promise, and wanted his brothers always to do the same.”¹³

The poverty of both brothers and sisters, therefore, depended upon their mutual relationship. In the beginning, the brothers who were sick or in need of spiritual care solicited help from the sisters; the sisters, in turn, depended upon the brothers for their liturgical needs as well as for various temporal goods that came from outside work and begging. While the sisters had a garden and people came to the monastery

¹⁰ Concerning Francis and Clare’s use of radical passages within the gospels see Jean François Godet-Calogeras, “Evangelical Radicalism in the Writings of Francis and Clare of Assisi,” *FS* 64 (2006): 103–21.

¹¹ Concerning the history of this understanding of poverty see Franco dal Pino, “Scelte di povertà all’origine dei nuovi ordini religiosi dei secoli XII–XIV,” in *La conversione alla povertà nell’Italia dei secoli XII–XIV*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 53–125 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1991).

¹² *FLCI* 6:3–4.

¹³ *FLCI* 6:5.

with gifts, the brothers begged for whatever else might be needed for themselves and the care of the sisters.¹⁴

Although seemingly simple, Clare would struggle to protect this vision of her vocation and the mutuality with the brothers upon which this vision relied. Just three years after Clare had sealed her agreement with Francis, the Fourth Lateran Council mandated the stabilization of religious life by prohibiting the establishment of new religious rules.¹⁵ Pope Honorius III, in an attempt to implement the council's mandate, appointed the canonist, Cardinal Ugolino Conti di Segni to oversee the task of bringing monasteries without appropriate regulation under the legislation of the Roman church.¹⁶ Cardinal Ugolino began by receiving under the jurisdiction of the Holy See properties that had previously been donated to groups of women who built monasteries, or who were living in converted buildings connected with hospitals or

¹⁴ Theologies of spiritual complementarity between sexes patterned on the eschatological vision of Galatians 3:28, "in Christ there is neither male nor female," were common in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See Constance Berman, "Men's Houses, Women's Houses: The Relationship between the Sexes in Twelfth-Century Monasticism," in *The Medieval Monastery*, ed. Andrew MacLeish, 43–52 (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1988); Kaspar Elm, "Le donne negli ordini religiosi dei secoli XII e XIII," in *Chiara e il secondo ordine: Il fenomeno francescano femminile nel Salento*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 9–22 (Galatina: Congedo Editore, 1997); John Coakley, "Gender and the Authority of Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth-Century Franciscans and Dominicans," *Church History* 60 (1991): 445–60; and Fiona Griffiths, "The Cross and the *cura monialium*: Robert of Arbrissel, John the Evangelist, and the Pastoral Care of Women in the Age of Reform," *Speculum* 83 (2008): 303–30.

¹⁵ Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, *Nicaea I to Lateran V* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), Canon 13. For commentary see Michele Maccarrone, "Le costituzioni del IV Concilio Lateranense sui religiosi," in *Nuovi studi su Innocenzo III*, ed. Roberto Lambertini, 1–45 (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, 1995); Kaspar Elm, "Gli ordini mendicanti: Un ceta di vita religiosa," in *Il papato duecentesco e gli ordini mendicanti*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 3–22 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1998); Franco dal Pino, "Papato e ordini mendicanti-apostolici minori nel Duecento," in *Il papato Duecentesco e gli ordini mendicanti*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 105–59 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1998); and Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Curia romana e regolamentazione delle Damianite e delle Domenicane." In *Regulae, consuetudines, statuta: Studi sulle fonti normative degli ordini religiosi nei secoli centrali del medioevo*, ed. Cristina Andenna and Gert Melville, 501–37 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

¹⁶ Concerning the career of Ugolino see Werner Maleczek, *Papst und Kardinalskolleg von 1191 bis 1216: Die Kardinäle unter Coelestin III. und Innocenz III* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), 126–33; and Diane Joan Moczar, "From Hugolino Conti to Gregory IX: The Making of a Medieval Pope" (DAEd diss., George Mason University, 1990).

churches on donated properties.¹⁷ Using his authority, Ugolino convinced both local donors and bishops to renounce their ordinary ecclesiastical rights in regard to these properties and monasteries. Ugolino was creating something new—female monasteries that would be free from the constructs of lay patronage and local episcopal rule.¹⁸

On August 27, 1218, Honorius responded to a letter written by Ugolino telling the papacy of women who escaped the pomp and wealth of the world and built for themselves small dwellings. While donors gave land to the Roman church for the building of these monasteries, local clerics wanted to administrate the “correction, institution, and dissolution” of these institutions. Responding to Ugolino’s report, Honorius wanted to insure that the religious impetus of these women would be respected, and that local clergy and patrons would not entangle these religious women in litigation. To this end, Honorius asked Ugolino to insure that the monasteries would be “without possessions, tithes, and mortuary payments from which diocesan bishops and other church prelates customarily gain the precedent of payment.”¹⁹

Responding to Honorius’s directive to protect the women and also assure local prelates that their financial rights would not be defrauded, Ugolino, using the Rule of S. Benedict as his canonical base, wrote a *forma vitae* that he hoped would unite the many monasteries of women north of Rome living without recognized legislation. He placed these feminine foundations under the law and property of the

¹⁷ Regarding these types of monasteries see Kaspar Elm, “Vita regularis sine regula: Significato, collocazione giuridica e autocoscienza dello stato semireligioso nel medioevo,” in *Regulae, consuetudines, statuta: Studi sulle fonti normative degli ordini religiosi nei secoli centrali del medioevo*, ed. Cristina Andenna and Gert Melville, 407–21 (Münster: Lit Verlag 2005).

¹⁸ Regarding the Ugolinian *forma vitae* see Luigi Pellegrini, “Female Religious Experience and Society in Thirteenth-Century Italy,” in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Barbara Rosenwein, 97–122 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Maria Pia Alberzoni, “*Servus vestrum et ancillarum Christi omnium*,” *FS* 64 (2006): 145–70; Cristina Andenna, “Dalla religio pauperum dominarum de valle Spoliti all’ordo Sancti Damiani,” in *Die Bettelorden im Aufbau: Beiträge zu Institutionalisierungsprozessen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum*, ed. Gert Melville and Jörg Oberste, 429–92 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1999); Isaac Vázquez, “La *forma vitae* Hugoliniana para las Clarisas en una bula desconocida de 1245,” *Antonianum* 52 (1977): 94–125; Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 18–52.

¹⁹ *BF* I:1–2.

Roman church, in an attempt to render moot incessant arguments over tithes and taxes leveled against monasteries by wealthy families, civil authorities, and local bishops. As long as a monastery's discipline was competently enforced and their possessions remained under the jurisdiction of the apostolic see, the meaning of what it meant to be a religious would be clear to all, and the sisters could devote themselves peacefully to prayer.

In July of 1219, Cardinal Ugolino began his work in Monteluca, Siena, and Lucca,²⁰ and a few months later wrote to Lady Avvegnente of the Florentine Albizzi family who had given property to the Roman church on which she constructed a monastery of penitential women on the hill of Monticelli near Florence.²¹ Even before receiving the Rule of S. Benedict from Ugolino, Avvegnente and her sisters had voluntarily imposed upon themselves the Rule of the Order of the Ladies of S. Mary of S. Damiano in Assisi. What is missing in the papal letter to Avvegnente and her sisters is a reference to the Ugolinian *forma vitae* that was mentioned in the letters to Siena, Monteluca, and Lucca. It seems that in the case of Monticelli, the Rule of the Order of the Ladies of S. Mary of S. Damiano in Assisi was recognized as an alternative to the newer Ugolinian legislation.²²

Nonetheless, the sisters of Monticelli did receive the letter, *Prudentibus Virginibus*, outlining Ugolino's expectations for their monastic life. According to Ugolino, the sisters' property would be placed under the law and patronage of the Holy See. They would follow the Rule of S. Benedict and the *forma vitae* of the ladies of S. Damiano, and while they were to pay their diocesan bishop a yearly pound of wax, they were not obliged to pay tithes on the fruits of their enclosure

²⁰ BF I:10–11; 11–13; and 13–15.

²¹ BF I:3–5.

²² On the local distinctions in the founding of these two kinds of monasteries, see Luigi Pellegrini, "Female Religious Experience," in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts*, 112–13; also Luigi Pellegrini, "Le *pauperes dominae* nel contesto dei movimenti religiosi femminili italiani del secolo XIII," in *Chiara e il secondo ordine: Il fenomeno francescano femminile nel Salento*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 71–84 (Galatina: Congedo Editore, 1997).

In 2000, Simon Tugwell presented a possible copy of Ugolino's 1219 *forma vitae* that he found in the Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels, manuscript IV 63, that lists both the Monasteries of S. Damiano and Florence. See Simon Tugwell, "The Original Text of the *Regula Hugolini* (1219)," *AFH* 93 (2000): 511–13. For a critical study of this document, see Giovanni Boccali, "La *cum omnis vero religio* del cardinale Ugolino: *Forma vite* primitiva per San Damiano ed altri monasteri," *Frate Francesco* 74 (2008): 435–77.

or gardens. The sisters were permitted to receive women into their monastery, but once a sister made profession, she was not to leave the enclosure. Any sister wanting to transfer to another monastery would need a public, written statement from the monastery to this effect. No one was permitted to enter the sisters' enclosure except for those with special permission, but the bishop of the diocese or another bishop of good-standing had the license to dedicate their churches, consecrate altars, and ordain clerics for their church. When the abbess died, the sisters were to choose another according to the Rule of S. Benedict and report the election results to the apostolic see. Visitation and interdict for the monastery was under the jurisdiction of the Holy See, and the sisters could proceed with their sacramental lives when under diocesan interdict as long as they did not harbor the excommunicated and prayed quietly. Only women of the monastery had permission to be buried in the monastic cemetery.²³

Certain Franciscan brothers were appointed by Cardinal Ugolino to attend to the fiscal and pastoral business of a small, but growing number of Ugolinian monasteries. On June 16, 1223, Ottone, the bishop of Camerino, gave up his rights to tithes and of visitation to the Franciscan, Brother Paul, the receiving agent for the nuns living in the Church of S. Salvatore.²⁴ In June of 1224, Cardinal Ugolino appointed Brother Bartolo as the receiving agent for the sisters of Faenza who were to "serve the Lord in poverty without possessions, graves, and tithes according to the rule of life given to them and other sisters of this religious order by the authority of the Lord Pope through this bishop."²⁵ On August 27, 1227, Pope Gregory referred to the nuns at the monastery of Siena as "ladies of Benedict," but, nonetheless, gave them a Franciscan visitor.²⁶ In these roles, the Franciscan brothers were acting as papal agents under the direction of Cardinal Ugolino.

On December 14, 1227, Ugolino, who had now become Pope Gregory IX, gave the Friars Minor, simply by virtue of obedience, the responsibility for the "poor, enclosed nuns."²⁷ With this mandate, the founding of monasteries of poor nuns suddenly stopped. The Friars

²³ *BF* I:3–5.

²⁴ Michele Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," *MF* 11 (1909): 98–99.

²⁵ Francesco Lanzoni, "Le antiche carte del convento di S. Chiara in Faenza," *AFH* 5 (1912): 272–73.

²⁶ *BF* I:33–34.

²⁷ *BF* I:36–37.

Minor were not the only Order protesting the papal imposition of the *cura monialium* at this juncture. Both the Dominicans and the Cistercians passed legislation in 1228, refusing the care of nuns. While male clerics would work in papal assignments as visitors and pastors, male orders did not want to be permanently obligated to the fiscal, social, and pastoral responsibilities of the *cura monialium*.²⁸

It was clear to Pope Gregory IX that the fiscal viability of the Ugo-
linian monasteries would, in the future, need to rely on regular income that needed to be generated from landed endowments. Signifying this adjustment in a September 8, 1229 document, Gerardo, the bishop of Trent, specifically stated that Ugolino's *forma vitae* was to be observed completely by the Trent sisters "in all its sections and articles, except for their having goods and possessions, since they are not bound by the section about not having possessions according to their rule."²⁹ While he recognized that the monasteries of the poor ladies of "Assisi, Perugia, and Siena," were under an exemption by the Holy See,³⁰ he was also clear that monasteries without landed endowments were a thing of the past.

THE "PRIVILEGE OF POVERTY"

In Thomas of Celano's papally-commissioned *Vita* prepared shortly after Francis's 1228 canonization, Thomas tweaked history in an attempt to bring Clare in line with evolving papal policy. While Thomas painted an edifying picture of the sisters of S. Damiano and nearly canonized Clare in his description of her life and virtues, he carefully explained that while Francis inspired Clare's way of life, it was Gregory who provided her with the needed monastic legislation. As Gregory had worked to negotiate a rule for the friars, so he had provided needed legislation for the sisters. Thomas states: "For now, let us just say this concerning these virgins dedicated to God and the most devout handmaids of Christ. Their wondrous life and their glorious constitutions, that they have received from the Lord Pope Gregory,

²⁸ John Freed, "Urban Development and the *cura monialium* in Thirteenth Century Germany," *Viator* 3 (1972): 311–27.

²⁹ Domenico Gobbi, "La seconda fondazione delle Clarisse di Trento nel secolo XIII *domus iuxta ecclesiam sancti Michaelis*," *Civis: Studi e Testi* 15 (1991): 29–30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

who was at the time the bishop of Ostia, require a work of their own and the leisure in which to write it.”³¹

After the July 1228, canonization of S. Francis, Gregory himself visited the Monastery of S. Damiano, and because of the “current events” and the “dangers of the world,” tried to persuade Clare of the need for a regular income from landed endowments. To his proposal Clare “resolutely resisted and would in no way acquiesce.”³² Gregory assured Clare that she should not fear being unfaithful to her original vow since he had the power to dispense her. Clare remained undeterred: “Holy Father, I have absolutely no desire ever to be absolved from the following of Christ.”³³

The sisters in the canonization process also mention this incident. Sister Pacifica affirmed that Clare loved poverty and “could never be persuaded to desire anything for herself or to receive any possession for herself or the monastery.”³⁴ Pacifica testified that “she saw and heard that Lord Pope Gregory of happy memory wanted to give her many things and buy possessions for the monastery, but Clare would never consent.”³⁵ Sister Benvenuta of Perugia confirmed Pacifica’s account testifying that “neither Pope Gregory nor the bishop of Ostia could ever make her consent to receive any possessions.”³⁶

Although Gregory IX did not persuade Clare to accept the endowments he wanted to give her, his Ugolinian constitutions were non-negotiable. On August 18, 1228, the newly appointed cardinal protector of the Ugolinian sisters, Cardinal Rainaldo, wrote to all monasteries following the Ugolinian constitutions. The first mentioned in the address is Gregory IX’s prize—the Monastery of S. Damiano in Assisi.³⁷

³¹ *IC* 20:5.

³² *LegCl* 14:5.

³³ *LegCl* 14:7.

³⁴ *Process* 1:13.

³⁵ *Process* 1:13.

³⁶ *Process* 2:22.

³⁷ Ignacio Omaechevarria, ed., *Escritos de Santa Clara y documentos contemporaneos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1970), 299–302. Concerning this letter see Marco Bartoli, “Gregorio IX, Chiara d’Assisi e le prime dispute all’interno del movimento francescano,” in *Rendiconti dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 35 (1980): 97–108; Maria Pia Alberzoni, *Chiara e il papato* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1995), 52–63; Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 37–39.

In order to accomplish the unification of these independent monasteries, Gregory wisely permitted diversity in the following of his constitutions. To this end, he encouraged the sisters to petition for exemptions, if certain provisions of his constitutions proved problematic. Using this caveat, Clare asked for an exemption to protect the way of life Francis had given her. On September 17, 1228, Gregory sent a letter to the S. Damiano monastery confirming that the sisters would not be forced to accept landed endowments.³⁸

In typical canonical format, Gregory's letter summarizes the petitioner's request before presenting the canonical response. Clare had assured the papacy that she wanted to be dedicated to God alone and had given up temporal matters—one should remember that landed endowments incurred temporal concerns of administration, interaction with civil authorities, and lawsuits. In addition, Clare affirmed that she and her sisters followed the gospel path by selling everything and giving it to the poor. They wanted to have absolutely no possessions, clinging always to the footsteps of him who was made poor for the sake of humankind, and who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

In addition, Clare wrote that her sisters did not fear to live without possessions because they believed that the left hand of the Spouse would provide any temporal need they might incur. Since God feeds the birds of the sky and clothes the lilies of the field, the sisters were confident that God would provide them with food and clothing until he personally served them in eternity. Moreover, the right hand of the Lord would more blissfully embrace the sisters in the greatness of his vision.

While Gregory acquiesced to giving Clare her "privilege of poverty," he certainly did not do so enthusiastically. Gregory's hope was to endow women's monasteries with adequate resources to enable the sisters to live a regular lifestyle that was not stressed by the precariousness of poverty. Well-funded monasteries of women were a credit to the church, a conduit of resources from the wealthy, and a practical means for providing pastoral care to the laity. While Gregory wanted to shore up the church, Clare's interest was in following the Poor Christ by living in austere poverty and distributing the resources of the wealthy to the poor living near the S. Damiano monastery. As Clare was funneling the dowries of her sisters to the poor around Assisi,

³⁸ BF I:771.

Gregory hoped these same dowries might support Clare's monastery and in turn the Roman church.

While Clare had asked Gregory for permission to "have no possessions whatsoever," Gregory gave her the exemption not to "be compelled by anyone to receive possessions."³⁹ Gregory hoped that Clare's inflexibility regarding the issue of endowments could gradually be whittled away. If the sisters received the permission not to be compelled by anyone to receive possessions, they might realize the need for endowments in the future and would not then have to go through the embarrassing process of asking Rome for disengagement from what they had formerly petitioned.

Throughout this controversy, Clare drew strength from the words of Francis himself. At the end of her life, she would archive Francis's words to her concerning poverty at the very center of her *forma vitae*.

I, little brother Francis, want to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and of his Most Holy Mother and to persevere in this until death. And I beg and counsel you, my ladies, always to live in this most holy life and poverty. Guard yourselves carefully that you never, in any respect whatsoever, turn away from this because of the teaching or advice of anyone.⁴⁰

In 1228, Clare interpreted Francis's "anyone" as the pope himself. She kept her promise of absolute poverty for her monastery, knowing full well that she risked papal confrontation and contempt. Persevering, she had received a privilege that would protect her monastery, at least for a time, from becoming just another Ugolinian monastery deprived of the dream that she had held with Francis. This dream was to follow the Poor Christ by living poorly among the poor, sharing their lot, and funneling resources from wealthy women directly to the poor around the Assisi commune.

Gregory, however, was not to be outwitted. Accompanying Clare's "privilege of poverty" was another papal letter.⁴¹ In this letter, Gregory belittled Francis's involvement in the founding of the Poor Ladies and

³⁹ BF I:771.

⁴⁰ FLCI 6:7-9.

⁴¹ I date *Deus Pater* (BF I:37) contemporaneously with Clare's "privilege of poverty" because Gregory IX will follow this same canonical pattern of letters in 1238, when granting the "privilege of poverty" in the case of Agnes of Prague. See the May 9, 1238, letter, *De conditoris omnium*, BF I:241-42.

emphasized his own contribution. He began by outlining a spirituality of enclosure rather than poverty. While the sisters were to embrace the suffering of leaving behind the charism of their foundation, in doing so, they would find that what was bitter would become sweet. Gregory's reference, of course, echoed the conversion of Francis. While Francis embraced poverty to discover sweetness, Gregory asked the sisters to find Franciscan sweetness by accepting the suffering of institutionalization. In doing so, they were to "forget the past, and move toward the future by striving after better gifts."⁴² And, Gregory promised, the sweetness would not only be eschatological. Gregory would embrace the sisters of S. Damiano as his special daughters, knowing that they would always remember him in their prayers.

"LADY AGNES, HER OWN DEAREST MOTHER"

While Clare hung onto her pauperistic lifestyle by the thread of her "privilege of poverty," news of Clare's way of life at the S. Damiano monastery had traveled north of the Alps via the friars, perhaps at the instigation of Brother Elias, minister general of the Franciscan brothers.⁴³ In the city of Prague, a young princess was enamored by the friars' stories of the noble woman of Assisi and decided to follow Clare's vision. The youngest daughter of King Přemysl Otakar I of Bohemia and Queen Constance of Hungary, Agnes of Prague was determined to use her royal riches to affect changes for the poor and insure her heavenly reward. She would do this so successfully that on her deathbed Clare would refer to the younger Agnes as "the other half of her soul" and "her own dearest mother."⁴⁴

Snubbing a marriage invitation from the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, Agnes was determined to live a Franciscan monastic life. Agnes's cousin, Elizabeth of Hungary, had spent her widow's pension to found a hospital in Marburg to care for the sick and poor, and after her early death, Elizabeth became the most popular female saint in

⁴² BF I:37.

⁴³ Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Chiara e San Damiano tra ordine minoritico e curia papale," in *Clara Claris Praeclara: L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte*, 27–70 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004). See also Guilia Barone, *Da frate Elia agli Spirituali* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1999), 78.

⁴⁴ 4LAg 1.

the thirteenth century. Many wealthy women emulated her, and her cousin, Agnes, would be the first of these.⁴⁵

Following Elizabeth's lead, Agnes built a large hospital in Prague for the sick and poor dedicated to the recently canonized Francis of Assisi. In order to secure its long-term viability, Agnes endowed this hospital with the significant resources of her royal dowry. Supporting fully Agnes's saintly aspirations—the Přemysl dynasty did not yet have a canonized family saint—Agnes's mother, Constance, and her brother, Přemysl, margrave of Moravia, also donated significant resources to the hospital endowment. A group of pious brothers, who had been gathered by the Friars Minor in Prague, staffed the hospital. Calling themselves the Crosiers with the Red Cross and Star, these brothers professed the Rule of S. Augustine and were supported, like the hospital inmates, by the Přemysl endowment. Both these brothers and Agnes's hospital are still in existence today.⁴⁶

In addition to the hospital, Agnes built a monastery that she hoped to model on S. Damiano in Assisi. While heavily endowing the hospital with her own dowry and other resources donated by the royal family, Agnes and her family left the monastery unendowed.⁴⁷ Agnes and her sisters would, like the sisters in Assisi, rely totally on the generosity of their neighbors and the Franciscan brothers for their sustenance. After the canonization of S. Elizabeth in 1235, however, Gregory began a feverish endowment program for women's monasteries under the Ugolinian jurisdiction even endowing some of them from his personal resources.⁴⁸ When studying the case of the new monastery at Prague, Gregory was determined to bring it in line with his current policy.

To this end, when Gregory accepted the monastery at Prague under Roman jurisdiction, he stipulated that the monastery that Agnes and her family had so carefully separated from the hospital would admin-

⁴⁵ Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, trans. Éva Pálmai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 202–3.

⁴⁶ Concerning this hospitaller Order see Milan Buben, *Rytířský řád křižovníků s červenou hvězdou* (Prague: L. P., 1996); V. Bělohávek, *Dějiny českých křižovníků s červenou hvězdou* (Prague: Nákl. rádu Českých křižovníků, 1930); and Andreas Rütger, "Between International Horizon and Regional Boundary: The Bohemian Crosiers of the Red Star in Silesia," in *Mendicants, Military Orders, and Regionalism in Medieval Europe*, ed. Jürgen Sarnowsky, 103–14 (Aldershot: Hamphire, 1999).

⁴⁷ *BF* I:156–59.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *BF* I:177; 199; 201–2; and 204–5.

istrate and benefit from the hospital endowment.⁴⁹ Under the papal plan, not only did Agnes not give her dowry away to the poor, she would benefit from the significant endowment donated by others in her family that had been intended specifically for the service of the poor in the hospital. As a Franciscan sister, Agnes would have more resources at her discretion than she had had in the world. To Agnes's Franciscan heart, this was completely unacceptable.

Writing to Clare, Agnes expressed her anguish and asked for advice. In her reply, Clare expressed the hope that Agnes might always "live in the utmost poverty."⁵⁰ Agnes had chosen a life of perfection, a Franciscan religious life. For Clare, the spirituality of this life was simply the biblical program: "If you wish to be *perfect*, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me (Matthew 19:21)." The life of perfection consisted of the selling of one's goods, the giving of the monies earned to the poor, and the subsequent following of Christ. Agnes had already done the "selling." Clare understood that Agnes did not want to accept the hospital endowment since she did not want God's eyes to see anything imperfect, i.e., possessions, in her.⁵¹ Rather, Agnes was to hold fast to her founding vision. Clare encouraged her:

What you hold, continue to hold.
What you do, keep doing and do not stop.
But with swift pace, nimble step, and feet that
do not stumble so that even your walking
does not raise any dust,
go forward tranquilly, joyfully, briskly, and cautiously
along the path of happiness.⁵²

Clare's admonition is an interesting one. Agnes was to ignore the papal decree, but was to do this with Franciscan decorum. She was to move swiftly and courageously, and yet, "raise no dust." In other words, she was to cause no scandal or commotion as she took her stand. She was to be joyful, confident, and yet cautious.

Clare once again would take a radical position. In regard to the Franciscan choice to be truly poor, Gregory could not be trusted. Although a former friend of Francis, Gregory did not understand the Franciscan

⁴⁹ *BF* I:156; *CDB* III:144–47.

⁵⁰ *2Lag* 2.

⁵¹ *2Lag* 4.

⁵² *2Lag* 11–13.

imperative to be poor as the essence of the Franciscan vocation. Agnes was to move forward:

trusting in no one and agreeing with no one
insofar as he might want to dissuade you from
pursuing your founding purpose
or might place a stumbling block in your way,
preventing you, in that perfection with which
the Spirit of the Lord has called you,
from fulfilling your vows to the Most High.⁵³

Knowing that she would need support in her rejection of papal authority in this case, Clare reminded Agnes that she was a Franciscan sister and that her obedience had been placed in the hands of the minister general. Trusting that Brother Elias would protect Agnes's interests, Clare offered her this advice:

Now concerning this, so that you may walk more tranquilly along the way of the Lord's commands, follow the advice of our venerable father, our Brother Elias, minister general. Prefer his advice to the advice of others and consider it more precious to you than any gift.

Indeed, if someone tells you something else
or suggests anything to you
that may hinder your perfection
or seems contrary to your divine vocation,
even though you must respect him,
still, do not follow his advice.

Instead, poor virgin,
embrace the Poor Christ.⁵⁴

Gregory, unlike Elias, could not be trusted much less followed, not because he was malicious or undeserving of the respect due his office, but because he was suggesting something contrary to Agnes's divine vocation. Francis had instructed Clare and her sisters to "guard yourselves carefully that you never turn, in any respect whatsoever, away from this because of the teaching or advice of anyone."⁵⁵ In advising Agnes to respect the pope, but not follow his counsel, Clare is calling upon the authority and mandate that S. Francis himself had given to her and her sisters.

⁵³ 2*LA*g 14.

⁵⁴ 2*LA*g 15–18.

⁵⁵ *FLC*I 6:9.

Clare knew from her own experience that Gregory would not retreat quietly. In the choice of poverty, the contempt of others is not far behind. The remainder of Clare's reply to Agnes focused on how to deal with the papal contempt that would inevitably follow. Agnes was to meditate on the suffering and contemptibleness of Christ, and desire to follow him in this contempt. If she followed Christ in suffering, she would forever share the heavenly rather than the transitory, and eternal goods rather than those that perish.⁵⁶

THE POLITICS OF POVERTY

While Agnes had in her corner the authority of Brother Elias and Clare of Assisi, she knew the stakes were high and was willing to play every card. In addition to contacting Clare and Elias, she also petitioned her brother, King Wenceslas, to intervene with the papacy on her behalf. Since Bohemia was a needed papal ally in the imperial-papal conflict, Agnes knew that her brother could exert the political pressure needed to evoke a papal change of heart.

One can hardly help but smile when reading Wenceslas's letter to the pope.⁵⁷ He begins by saying:

First, I thank you profusely, Most Excellent Sanctity, for the persevering and kind affection that you continually bestow on your very dear daughter and my beloved sister, Lady Agnes, of the Order of Poor Ladies. She herself witnesses to the fact that she never recalls having asked Your Sanctity anything that she did not soon receive from you. Because of this, your kindness draws me with all my power, which lies in my kingdom, family, in-laws, and friends alike, to you, and to the whole Roman curia in all devotion.

The mention of Wenceslas's significant allies was in itself a royal ploy. While Gregory was left pondering the ramifications of not ceding to the wishes of the Bohemian throne, Wenceslas made clear exactly what he wanted. The resources of Bohemia would be at Gregory's service, if he acceded to Agnes's demands.

After lengthy deliberation, I solemnly vow and promise to God that from this action I will sincerely want to be ever more ready and available for you and the holy Roman church in every necessity or opportunity, both

⁵⁶ *2LAg* 23.

⁵⁷ *CDB* III:182–83.

public and private. This will be particularly true if you decide with your customary kindness that the requests of your above-mentioned special daughter and my most-beloved blood sister, which she herself has asked of you now, ought to be admitted into the chapel of your kind hearing. Knowing this to be certain and proven that, since you give satisfaction to her requests, which without doubt are pleasing to God because they come from him, you receive me, as I have said, with all my power under your power, which is worthy in every respect.

The papal response to the royal petition was swift. Although irritated by Agnes's politicking, Gregory reversed his decision and again separated Agnes's monastery from the hospital's endowment.⁵⁸ To provide for the administration of the hospital, Gregory recognized the Order of the Crosiers of the Red Star in law.⁵⁹ Since these brothers were to inhabit and administrate an endowed institution, they were to follow the Rule of S. Augustine rather than the Rule of S. Francis. In Agnes's mind, the lack of revenue-generating endowments was what separated Franciscans from other religious. This view, of course, was not shared by the papacy. At the same time, Gregory also granted Agnes the "privilege of poverty."⁶⁰ Like the privilege given to S. Damiano, Gregory legislated that the sisters of Agnes's monastery could not be *forced* to receive possessions, not that they could not receive possessions. Again, if the sisters changed their minds in the future, there would be no need for them, given this wording, to face the embarrassment of requesting that the pope undo their own petition.

While acquiescing to Agnes's desires, Gregory did not welcome her political maneuvering nor did he appreciate being manipulated into approving a royal pauperistic monastery. His hope was to unravel Agnes's designs by instigating unrest within her monastic community. Hoping to instill some sense into Agnes's idealism, Gregory's "privilege of poverty" for the Prague monastery was accompanied by a papal decree that significantly changed its fasting regulations.⁶¹ Stating that the reason for the legislation was the coldness of the Bohemian climate, Gregory ruled that the sisters could eat twice a day and partake of dairy products. In addition, the sisters did not need to fast during Easter week, on the solemnities of the Blessed Virgin Mary and

⁵⁸ BF I:240.

⁵⁹ BF I:216–17.

⁶⁰ BF I:236–37.

⁶¹ BF I:240–41.

the apostles, and on Christmas day. Moreover, during Lent, the pope decreed that they could eat just as on other fast days. The doubling of the sisters' food intake and the addition of dairy products—products that required animals and land—placed the sisters' table beyond the ability of the brothers to beg for them. A regular table with animal products would require landed endowments.

While she was upset about this legislation, Agnes was not deterred. She had won one battle, and she wanted more. Her dream was to live not under the Rule of S. Benedict, but under Franciscan legislation written specifically for sisters. She petitioned Gregory to confirm a text based on the *forma vitae* that Francis had originally given to Clare and on the Ugolinian legislation. While Ugolinian discipline would be protected, Agnes wanted her "privilege of poverty" to be more than an exemption. She wanted a specifically Franciscan *forma vitae*.

Gregory was in no mood to be outwitted again and was not about to establish a novel rule for sisters who, in his mind, were better off following the time-tested Benedictine rule and the constitutions that he had composed specifically for them. He insisted that individual charismatic impulses were best handled through exemptions. Agnes had already been given the "privilege of poverty." She had everything that she needed to live an exemplary religious life.

ARGUING ABOUT "INFANT'S MILK"

Responding to Agnes's request, Gregory denied her for three reasons.⁶² First, Clare and the sisters of S. Damiano were peacefully living under the Ugolinian legislation and the "privilege of poverty." Certainly given this truth, Agnes could not claim a charismatic necessity to live under a novel rule. Second, Clare and her sisters put aside the *forma vitae* given to them by S. Francis and had observed their rule in a praiseworthy fashion from the time of their profession to the present day. Third, since the rule was already uniformly observed, Gregory feared that there might be some sisters who would falter due to conflicts over the rule's observance. The Franciscan brothers had already been besieged by such conflicts; Gregory did not wish the sisters to suffer the same disputes.

⁶² BF I:242–44.

Although annoyed with Agnes's insistence, Gregory acknowledged that she did have history on her side. He admitted that when he was cardinal protector of the Franciscans, Clare, the abbess of the Monastery of S. Damiano in Assisi, and some other women set aside the vanity of the world and chose to serve Francis under the observance of religious life. At this time, Blessed Francis, according to Gregory, "gave them a draught of milk as a way of life as this fit them, newly born as they was, better than solid food." The *forma vitae* that Francis gave to Clare was, in Gregory's opinion, not a path to mature holiness but designed specifically for babes who were just beginning. Gregory had given the sisters at S. Damiano legislation that was befitting those who were mature; hungering for infant's milk was inappropriate at this juncture.

Gregory closed his letter by dispensing Agnes from any obligation she felt toward the observance of Francis's *forma vitae*, "since a vow does not compromise someone who has exchanged it for a better one," and commanded Agnes to accept the Benedictine rule, Ugolinian legislation, and her "privilege of poverty." If she had need of other dispensations in order to appease any conflict of soul, Gregory assured her that he would give her full consideration. While Gregory promised that he would supply exemptions from his constitutions to the Ugolinian sisters, he refused to permit them to formulate their own legislation. Agnes, in fact, took him up on his offer applying for exemptions that brought her monastery in line with the fasting practices at S. Damiano⁶³ and afforded the Franciscan brothers freer access to her monastery.⁶⁴ In so doing, she was whittling away at what would eventually become a Franciscan rule for women.

Under Clare and Agnes's plan, the poor directly benefitted from women who had significant resources at their disposal. In one recorded case, the papacy confirmed a donation of a certain Andrew of Pontibus who, for the salvation of his soul, gave to the abbess of the Monastery of S. Silverstro control over a land grant with its "vassals, rents, houses, lands, vineyards, fields, pastures, woods, and waterways."⁶⁵ Owning property in the thirteenth century was a human rights issue; both Clare and Agnes were well aware that the "privilege of poverty"

⁶³ BF I:258–59.

⁶⁴ BF I:295.

⁶⁵ BF I:320–22.

evened out the gulf between rich and poor. Since the possession of land also involved the possession of people, Clare and Agnes would play no part in the oppression of the downtrodden and the control of resources for the advantage of the rich.

After Gregory's death in August, 1241, Agnes approached Pope Innocent IV with the hope of finally fulfilling her dream of having her Franciscan way of life confirmed not as an exemption, but in law. Innocent immediately dashed her hopes reiterating the same three points against her petition that Gregory had previously made.⁶⁶ But Prague was not the only monastery who objected to following the Rule of S. Benedict. On August 21, 1244, the protest among the sisters of the Order of S. Damian was so great that Innocent was forced to address the issue insisting that nothing more was meant by the injunction to follow the Benedictine rule other than the renunciation of poverty, chastity and obedience.⁶⁷ As one can imagine, this legalistic reaction to legitimate concern hardly quelled the sisters' anxiety.

The friars, meanwhile, were progressively separating themselves from the sisters. More and more active in papal and noble politics, few friars wanted to be tied down to the pastoral and temporal care of the sisters. Stepping into the fray, Innocent insisted that the brothers were to fulfill these duties toward the sisters "because we do not want them to be incorporated into your Order."⁶⁸ While the friars did not want to accept the incorporation of the numerous Ugolinian monasteries with the accompanying pastoral and temporal responsibilities, neither were they interested in having the papacy delegate the pastoral duties of monasteries under papal protection to them.

While Innocent IV attempted to continue Gregory's institutionalization of the Franciscan Order,⁶⁹ he lacked the credibility of his successor who had been a personal friend of S. Francis. As a consequence, Innocent encountered Franciscan leaders who proved unsupportive of his efforts. Innocent's letter, *Ordinem vestrum*,⁷⁰ attempted to mitigate further the poverty of the friars at a time when many brothers desired

⁶⁶ BF I:315–17.

⁶⁷ BF I:350.

⁶⁸ BF I:420.

⁶⁹ Concerning the institutionalization of the Friars Minor see Théophile Desbonnets, *De l'intuition à l'institution: Les Franciscains* (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1983). In English as *From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans*, trans. Paul Duggan and Jerry Du Charme (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

⁷⁰ BF I:400–402.

to return to their more primitive roots. The situation became so acrimonious that some Franciscan brothers attempted to join the Cistercians, forcing Innocent IV to stop the hemorrhaging with a formal papal letter.⁷¹ The brothers, who had been progressively institutionalizing their charism under Gregory IX, vacillated now, undercutting the direction of encroaching papal intrusion into the Order's business by electing John of Parma as minister general, a pastoral man whose dealings with the brothers resembled S. Francis and who tended to ignore problematic papal intrusions.⁷²

In regard to the sisters, Innocent did seem to give them what they desired in that on August 6, 1247, he finally gave them permission to live under the Franciscan rule.⁷³ However, while he gave the sisters this coveted permission, his vision of the brothers' rule was so mitigated that the sisters refused to accept his papal decree. In the constitutions that he had written for the sisters,⁷⁴ Innocent wanted Franciscan women who would receive, hold, and retain revenue and possessions in common that would be administrated by a procurator. Their diet was to include milk, eggs, cheese, and even meat for the young. Although the brothers were to administer the sacraments to the sisters, they were not required to provide for their temporal needs or to live in convents attached to the sisters' monasteries. Innocent even decreed that Damianite monasteries could retain the inheritances of their sisters—completely opposing the command to “sell all you have.” In the end, Innocent's vision would prove to be far too radical for both the friars and those sisters who held fast to the “privilege of poverty.”

When the friars refused to implement the papal order to provide visitation services to Ugolinian monasteries of women, Innocent was compelled to act on the sisters' behalf. He wrote to Cardinal Rainaldo on June 17, 1248, explaining that the friars were not caring for the monasteries or providing visitation.⁷⁵ Cardinal Rainaldo would be

⁷¹ BF I:463–64.

⁷² Rosalind Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government: Elias to Bonaventure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 254–56.

⁷³ BF I:476–83.

⁷⁴ Concerning this legislation of Innocent IV see Giovanna Casagrande, “La regola di Innocenzo IV,” in *Clara Claris Praeclara: L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte*, 71–82 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004).

⁷⁵ BF Supp., 247.

needed to correct, reform, confirm abbesses, receive sisters, and other services, and Innocent, apparently realizing that he was in over his head, readily relinquished his legislation. When writing to the sisters of the Monastery of S. Paolo in Spoleto on March 6, 1249, Innocent mandated, as Gregory had, that the sisters follow not the Rule of S. Francis, but the Rule of S. Benedict.⁷⁶

On June 6, 1250, Innocent again wrote to Rainaldo concerning the direction of the nuns of the Order of S. Damian.⁷⁷ In order not to cause them disturbance, Innocent recognized charismatic differences decreeing that it was useful to "make use of serviceable enthusiasm," and formally released the sisters from the obligation to accept his ill-conceived constitutions. Rather, Rainaldo was to "see to it that the old formula that they accepted at the creation of their Order be observed by them inviolably if an advantage to their souls may be better gained through it." The sisters embraced this new freedom. On April 22, 1252, Innocent wrote to Cardinal Rainaldo concerning the Monticelli monastery in the diocese of Florence—the monastery administrated by Clare's blood sister, Agnes of Assisi. Innocent assigned Rainaldo and his successors the responsibility for the custody and correction of this monastery "for as long as they observe the *propositum* not to possess anything in the world except God."⁷⁸ The sisters connected with the spirit of S. Damiano were taking their stand. They were establishing in law their primitive charism, although they still did not have canonical legislation of their own.

THE POLITICS OF INFANT'S MILK

During Clare's canonization process, Sister Filippa testified that Innocent IV came to the Monastery of S. Damiano to visit Clare a few days before her death.⁷⁹ Obviously the pope left convinced of the integrity of Clare's monastery for shortly after, on August 10, 1253, a Franciscan brother appeared at S. Damiano with the letter, *Solet*

⁷⁶ Michele Faloci Pulignani, "Le Clarisse di S. Paolo presso Spoleto in documenti inediti del XIII secolo." *MF* 3 (1909):76-77.

⁷⁷ *BF Supp.*, 22-24.

⁷⁸ Zeffirino Lazzeri, "Bulla Innocentii Papae IV an. 1253 *privilegium paupertatis* Monasterium Florentino iam concessum comprobans," *AFH* 8 (1909): 311-12.

⁷⁹ *Process* 3:24.

annuere, stamped with the papal seal.⁸⁰ According to Sister Filippa, even though Clare was very close to death, she found the strength to kiss the letter on its papal seal. Taking material primarily from the Rule of S. Benedict and the *forma vitae* of Ugolino, Clare's *forma vitae* had an autobiographical center, archiving Francis's promises to her at its very core.⁸¹ Her "privilege of poverty" was finally confirmed with the highest approval.

Ecstatic for this gift, yet worn out by years of sickness, Clare died on August 11, 1253. The sisters, however, had not forgotten the tension that Innocent IV's legislation had caused during Clare's final years. Innocent's belittling of the poverty that had inspired Clare's original agreement with Francis as mere "infant's milk" and, therefore, irrelevant to an authentic religious life, would not easily be forgotten. For the sisters of S. Damiano and those associated with them, the "privilege of poverty" was the very essence of their vocation. They would use every opportunity to make clear to the ecclesiastical authorities their intention to remain firm concerning their *forma vitae*.

When Innocent IV commissioned Bishop Bartholomew of Spoleto to conduct an inquiry into the life, conversion, manner of monastic living, and miracles of Clare for the purpose of canonization,⁸² Clare's companions, Sister Pacifica, Sister Benvenuta of Perugia, Sister Filippa, Sister Cecilia, Sister Balvina, and Sister Beatrice, all spoke of Clare's absolute and unyielding commitment to "the privilege of poverty." These sisters had experienced Clare's journey and understood that for Clare, the "privilege of poverty" was not "infant's milk," but rather mature food capable of nurturing a stable religious lifestyle. In addition to the comments regarding Clare's protection of the "privilege of poverty," Sister Filippa, Sister Amata, Sister Cecilia, and Sister Balvina related the vignette concerning Clare drinking from the breast of Francis. By means of this parable, they could clearly, yet respectfully, affirm to the ecclesial commission their belief that their way of life was inspired, nourished, and founded by S. Francis through their mother, Clare, who had not only drunk deeply from the wisdom of Francis, but had also daily looked into the depths of his soul for her inspira-

⁸⁰ BF I:671–78.

⁸¹ For the significance of the placement of Francis's words at the center of Clare's text, see Margaret Carney, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi & Her Form of Life* (Quincy, IL: The Franciscan Press, 1993), 123–25.

⁸² *Process*, Prologue.

tion and *forma vitae*. Women living radical poverty in a Franciscan lifestyle were not naïve, but mature in both their religious life and commitment. Moreover, this religious life without endowments was not a burden to them, but rather filled them with delightful sweetness. The breast of Francis had not produced "infant's milk," but rather the nourishment, clarity, and wisdom needed for a lifetime of growth in holiness. As the Lord said, "take and drink," so could the crucified body of Francis invite Clare to experience the nourishment and freedom of a life lived without the exploitation of the poor and the terrors of litigation and violence. Freedom from the corruption of the exploitation of the poor was both sweetness and a true return to the primitive ideals of religious perfection.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *ORDO* THAT GREGORY IX FOUNDED CLARE AMONG OTHER UGOLINIAN SISTERS

Until the 1220's, the juridical regulation of women's monasticism was essentially a local phenomenon dependent upon the will of a diocesan bishop, a male monastery, or the leadership talent of a well-connected, moneyed woman. In Clare's case, S. Damiano was founded with the permission of a local bishop and the support of the Franciscan friars in a semi-abandoned property in response to the desire of Clare and her sister, Agnes, to live a penitential lifestyle. Other Ugolinian foundations were established by donors, while still others were founded by women of wealth who wished to live in monastic seclusion with their dowries intact.¹ When Gregory IX tried to legislate for monasteries north of Rome without a canonical rule, he found nuns in a variety of situations.

Despite the flurry of legislation concerning monasteries north of Rome in the first half of the thirteenth century, it is difficult to say with exact certainty what was accomplished. Amid hundreds of papal letters, one might conclude the following in regard to the canonical approach to religious women of the time:

1. Cardinal Ugolino's constitutions were adopted by many women's monasteries;
2. Ugolino used the Rule of S. Benedict as the basis for his constitutions;
3. Ugolino attempted to place women's monasteries under papal authority in order to protect them from the predatory interests of local bishops and avaricious laypeople;
4. Enclosure, not poverty, was the papal ideal for monastic women;
5. The papacy preferred self-supporting, endowed monasteries;

¹ These varying foundations with their legislative ambiguities continued even after the legislative efforts of the thirteenth-century papacy. See Katherine Jane Gill, "Penitents, *Pinzochere* and *Mantellate*: Varieties of Women's Religious Communities in Central Italy, c. 1300–1520" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1994), 13–58.

6. The papacy accommodated charismatic dissonances with the Ugolinian constitutions and local needs of individual monasteries by granting exemptions;
7. Even though unity was Ugolino's objective, there was a great deal of divergent customs, and exemptions were common.

When Pope Honorius III ascended to the papacy, he appointed Cardinal Ugolino of Ostia to accept monasteries of women and their properties under the law and patrimony of the Roman church. To rally the support of local clerics, Ugolino promised that these monasteries would not compete with diocesan entities for possessions, graves, and tithes. Within a short while, however, Ugolino reversed this policy and mandated that these monasteries be endowed and self-supporting.

It is within this context that we will examine a few of the monasteries within the Ugolinian movement. Most of these houses no longer survive, as many thirteenth-century female monasteries were not large institutional structures but rather small house convents often established in semi-abandoned and dilapidated buildings.² Our image of these monasteries, therefore, is primarily dependent upon the papal documents addressed to them.

Among the many thirteenth-century Ugolinian monasteries,³ for the purposes of this study, I selected four Italian monasteries that eventually accepted property and therefore distinguished themselves from those monasteries who petitioned for and retained the "privilege of poverty." These four monasteries give a sense of the legislation as well as some of the local dynamics that affected early Ugolinian sisters. Since Clare's monastery was part of the Ugolinian federation, studying

² Caroline Bruzelius, "Nuns in Space: Strict Enclosure and the Architecture of the Clarisses in the Thirteenth Century," in *Clare of Assisi: A Medieval and Modern Woman*, ed. Ingrid Peterson, 53–74 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1996).

³ See Anna Benvenuti, "La fortuna del movimento damianita in Italia (sec. XIII): Propositi per un censimento da fare," in *Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 57–106 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993); Roberto Rusconi, "L'espansione del francescanesimo femminile nel secolo XIII," in *Movimento religioso femminile e francescanesimo nel secolo XIII*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, 263–313 (Assisi: Società internazionale di studi francescani, 1980); Maria Pia Alberzoni, "L'ordine di S. Damiano in Lombardia," in *Chiara e il secondo ordine: Il fenomeno francescano femminile nel Salento*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 117–56 (Galatina: Congedo, 1997).

monasteries without the “privilege of poverty” gives one a fuller sense of the issues and lives of the nuns who formed this federation.

FAENZA: S. MARIA OF THE VIRGINS

According to Francesco Lanzoni,⁴ information concerning this monastery comes from an Abbot Tondini who, in the eighteenth century, copied several documents from the ancient Convent of S. Clare in Faenza. His small book entitled, *Memorie relative al Convento di Santa Chiara di Faenza* consists of 64 pages, an index, and transcriptions of the manuscripts that had been archived at the Monastery of Santa Chiara.

The first document dated December 16, 1209, is a civil land grant regarding the property of Gisilia, the wife of Scoitolo,⁵ located on the island of S. Martin within the territory of the parish church of Faenza. On June 4, 1223, Gisilia's brother, Bonaventure, sold Rodulfo Denago a kiln—the source of revenue for this property—with its accompanying land. With the land grant, Bonaventure also ceded the obligations concerning this property listed as: “legal rights, actions, petitions, cases, defenses, exceptions, legal aids that we have or hope to have in regard to this property, and taxation in the future as well as past taxation debts.” Bonaventure stated that Denago had paid in full the price of seventeen Ravennian denari for this property, and so had permission to enter and exit it as he willed.⁶

One year later, on June 3, 1224, at the imperial palace of Faenza, Rodulfo Denago, on behalf of himself and his heirs and for the benefit of the souls of his family, donated to Brother Bartolo, receiving agent for a group of virgins and sisters, a piece of land located among the outbuildings of S. Martin in Poggio.⁷ A church was located on this property along with outlying houses and buildings. Rodulfo ceded all the legal rights, cases, counter-claims, defenses, rights of patronage, and legal agreements to Brother Bartolo and the sisters he was representing.

⁴ “Le antiche carte del convento di Santa Chiara in Faenza,” *AFH* 5 (1912): 261–76.

⁵ Francesco Lanzoni, “Le antiche carte del convento di Santa Chiara in Faenza,” *AFH* 5 (1912): 267–68.

⁶ Lanzoni, “Le antiche carte,” 268–69.

⁷ Lanzoni, “Le antiche carte,” 270–71.

On July 13, 1224, in the episcopal palace of Faenza, Albert, the bishop of Faenza, in the presence of his cathedral canons, ceded to Brother Bartolo, the receiving agent acting in the name of Cardinal Ugolino, the church and property of S. Mary of the Virgins located on the island of S. Martin in Poggio with its gardens and appurtenances. Here, according to Albert, the virgins dedicated to God and other handmaids of Christ “serve the Lord in poverty without possessions, graves, and tithes according to the rule of life given to them and the other sisters of this religious Order by the authority of the Lord Pope.”⁸

While recognizing papal authority in the matter, Albert carefully listed and maintained his episcopal rights.⁹ He reserved the right to dedicate the church, consecrate its altars, bless the monastery’s abbesses, and consecrate its nuns. In recognition of these episcopal services, Albert requested a payment of one pound of wax annually on the Feast of S. Peter for the annual census. Moreover, if the sisters decided to become owners of their monastic property or other goods in the future, or if they fell away from living without possessions, graves, and tithes, they were to revert without contention to Albert’s jurisdiction. In other words, Albert understood Brother Bartolo’s agreement as a “special case” that depended upon a certain type of communal poverty that exempted these sisters from the regular, diocesan jurisdiction of monastic life.¹⁰

A year later on June 27, 1225, the bishop again met with interested clerical parties in the episcopal residence.¹¹ At this time, Peter, the prior representing the community of canons at S. Martin in Poggio, agreed that for the next one hundred years Lady Santese, the abbess of S. Maria of the Virgins and her sisters, could use the property on which they were living near the Church of S. Martin. His lease gave the sisters the right to have, hold, change, inhabit, and do whatever they wished with the land for the profit and use of their monastery for a rent of six Ravenian denarii. In addition to the rent, Brother Bartolo

⁸ Lanzoni, “Le antiche carte,” 271–72.

⁹ Lanzoni, “Le antiche carte,” 272–73.

¹⁰ Concerning monastic exemptions and interaction with diocesan clerics see Giles Constable, *Monastic Tithes: From their Origins to the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964); and Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Lanzoni, “Le antiche carte,” 273–74.

paid Peter and his canons money that they in turn used to buy property next to the canonry.

One can see from the above transactions, that Ugolino, through the person of his agent, Brother Bartolo, was doing all he could to avoid conflicts with the local clerics of Faenza. The bishop was placated because he was assured that the sisters would not be competing with the diocesan clerics for tithing and burial incomes. The canons of S. Martin were paid for their property and were also to receive an annual rent, even though the property was still technically theirs. In this way, the sisters could move into their monastery in peace, and local clerics would have no cause for complaint.

In an August 18, 1228, circular letter, Cardinal Rainaldo, the cardinal protector of the Ugolinian sisters under Gregory IX, listed the sisters included in the Ugolinian Order.¹² The sisters of Faenza were among those placed under Rainaldo's care and were given Brother Philip as their monastic visitor.

About three years later on April 23, 1231, Cardinal Ugolino, who was now Gregory IX wrote to Bishop Albert of Faenza referring to the sisters living in the Monastery of S. Maria on the island of S. Martin in the diocese of Faenza as sisters of "the Order of S. Damian."¹³ In his letter, Gregory asked Albert to protect dutifully the legal rights of the sisters, insuring that no one detain donations given in wills or last wishes to them. When the sisters had a legal complaint, the bishop was to put the offending party on notice and, if the complaint persisted, was to open an appeal to examine the case. The monastery at Faenza continued to grow and on June 5, 1233, entered into agreement to obtain another piece of land across the road from the monastery.¹⁴

On March 22, 1235, Pope Gregory IX addressed a letter to the "Monastery of S. Maria of the Virgins of the Order of S. Damian" relaying that he had received a letter from the Bishop of Faenza that exempted the monastery from episcopal law in both spiritual and temporal matters.¹⁵ Albert had reserved nothing for himself other than church sacraments and other ecclesial rituals, and one pound of wax to be paid annually. Although the bishop expressed his good will, the canons of

¹² Ignacio Omaechevarria, ed., *Escritos de Santa Clara y documentos contemporaneos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1970), 297–302.

¹³ Lanzoni, "Le antiche carte," 275.

¹⁴ Lanzoni, "Le antiche carte," 275–76.

¹⁵ *BF* I:149.

Faenza, no doubt disturbed that the monastery was now fiscally competing with them, no longer agreed with their bishop in regard to this exemption. Reprimanding their lack of generosity, Gregory affirmed the decision of the bishop over and against the canons.

Eventually not only practice, but also papal policy toward Ugolinian monasteries gradually eradicated earlier claims to utter poverty and favored the establishment of endowed monasteries. A letter sent by Pope Innocent IV to the Monastery of S. Maria of the Virgins in Faenza on January 12, 1253, documents an interesting source of monastic income.¹⁶ In his letter, Innocent permitted the sisters to receive up to one hundred imperial pounds from interest payments, seizures, and other improperly acquired goods as long as the owner was not able to be identified. The sisters could also receive this same amount for the redemption of unfulfilled vows.

From the above documents, not much can be said about the daily life of the monastery of sisters in Faenza, but civil and ecclesiastical actions regarding the legal standing of the monastery can be discerned. In this case, property was donated for the purpose of establishing the Faenza monastery from a pious lay person. The donation was given not to the local bishop, but to the agent of Cardinal Ugolino, Brother Bartolo, whose services were required specifically because the sisters moving onto the property wished to serve God without possessions, graves, and tithes according to the wishes of Pope Honorius III.

The bishop affirmed his episcopal rights but, because the sisters vowed to live in utter poverty, demanded from them only a symbolic annual tithe. When the sisters wanted to expand their property base, however, they needed to negotiate with the canons of S. Peter. These priests demanded a steep sum from the nuns in return for the use of land connected with their church. It was clear to the clerics that Rome was placing papal interests above local interests, and they did everything possible to secure at least a good price for their eroding rights.

With the Ugolinian constitutions, the sisters in Faenza were referred to as belonging to the "Order of S. Damian" and, like other Ugolinian monasteries in 1228, were assigned a Franciscan, Brother Philip, as their visitor. Relations between the sisters and the clerics of Faenza deteriorated as the sisters grew more numerous and were able to rent more property around their monastery. Eventually the

¹⁶ Lanzoni, "Le antiche carte," 276.

canons of Faenza were no longer supportive of the advantages given to the sisters, and attempted to block the continuance of their exemptions. Innocent IV intervened not only overturning the objections of the canons, but expanding the sisters' financial potential by allowing them to accept unclaimed funds and the redemption of vows.

SAN SEVERINO: MONASTERY OF S. SALVATORE

The monastery of sisters at S. Severino was suppressed in 1457, by Cardinal Roderico Borgia, who later became Pope Alexander VI, and its property and church were placed under the Collegiate Church of S. Salvatore in S. Severino. In 1764, the documents connected with the S. Severino monastery were examined by Francesco Antonio Benoffi, OFM, Conv., who transcribed thirty-three documents that he entitled, *Documenta Monasterii Damianitarum S. Salvatoris de Sancto Severino, ex Arch. Cath. S. Severini*. He compared these documents with originals that he was able to locate in the archive of the Cathedral of S. Severino. Thirty-one of these documents were from the thirteenth century.¹⁷

On June 16, 1223, in the presence of Brothers Martin, Jacob, and Ambrose, Ottone, the bishop of Camerino, promised Brother Paul, the receiving agent for the Church of S. Salvatore in the parish of S. Severino, that as long as the women living in S. Salvatore remained in daily poverty and religious life that he would neither require nor accept payment from them for the use of the S. Salvatore church.¹⁸ In addition, the bishop gave up his obligation of visitation for these women¹⁹ handing this duty over to the Friars Minor. The visitor was to be whoever Brother Francis, his successors, or the chapter of the Friars Minor chose. If, however, the women prevented a visitation, or if the friars neglected to appoint brothers for this task, Ottone retained the right to visit and correct the sisters himself. In addition, as long as

¹⁷ See Maria Cristina Marano, "Le Clarisse nelle Marche gli insediamenti del XIII secolo," *CF* 67 (1997): 107–12; Giammario Borri, "Problemi di territorialità tra *mulieres religiosae* a San Severino nel Duecento," in *Microcosmi medievali*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 218–54 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2002).

¹⁸ Lavarius Oligier, "De origine regularum ordinis S. Clarae," *AFH* 5 (1912): 200.

¹⁹ See Christopher Cheney, *Episcopal Visitation of Monasteries in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Porcupine Press, Inc., 1983).

the women of S. Severino remained in poverty, the bishop ceded to them permission to retain their mill and vineyard.

We know about Brother Paul also from *1Celano*.²⁰ According to Celano, Francis was walking with Brother Paul while on a preaching mission in the March of Ancona when they came upon a shepherd herding a flock of goats. In the midst of these goats was a lamb. Francis began preaching about this lamb imagining it to be like the meek and mild Jesus who had walked among the scribes and Pharisees. A traveling merchant, enthralled by Francis's presentation, offered to buy the lamb for him. Francis accepted the lamb, carried it to his audience with the bishop of Osimo, and used it as a prop to preach to him concerning the parable of the lost sheep. Knowing that Francis could not continue to keep the lamb on his missionary travels, Brother Paul suggested that he give it to the enclosed sisters at S. Severino. The sisters were more than happy to receive it and later made a tunic from its wool for Francis. They sent this tunic with the brothers who were traveling to attend the chapter at the Portiuncula. When Francis received the tunic, he was delighted, and hugged and kissed it. Obviously Francis approved the life of the sisters at S. Severino as well as the work of Brother Paul.

On February 19, 1224, Pandolfo, a subdeacon of Pope Honorius III, wrote to the sisters of S. Severino.²¹ Following the pauperistic ideals typical of Honorius's papacy, the sisters, "so that no deep source of ambition for keeping any personal property remain with them," were instructed that their census payment of six soldi to the abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Domora was to be reduced to twelve denarii per year. On December 24, 1224, Rainaldo, the bishop of Camerino who succeeded Bishop Ottone, wrote to Brother Paul, receiving agent for the S. Severino sisters, confirming that his administration would recognize the agreement that Ottone had made with the S. Severino monastery.²²

In January of 1228, Gregory IX responded to a complaint from the sisters at S. Severino concerning a judge, Robert, and other secular persons who were withholding money, land, possessions, and other goods that had been willed to their monastery.²³ Gregory wanted to

²⁰ *1C* 77–78.

²¹ Michele Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," *MF* 11 (1909): 99.

²² Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 99–100.

²³ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 100.

uphold the sisters' rights to these goods so that they would not be burdened by debt. A few months later on July 3, 1228, another new bishop of Camerino, Filippo, confirmed the exemption of the sisters of S. Severino from his jurisdiction with the exception of reserving the right to dedicate the church, consecrate the altars, and bless the nuns as was negotiated by his predecessors.²⁴ On January 18, 1229, Gregory IX wrote to the sisters of S. Severino accepting their monastery with its property, which he listed as having been donated by a noble family, under the jurisdiction of the Roman church.²⁵ With their new stature as a papal institution, the sisters were exempt from secular law and from paying their annual tax to the Monastery of Domora.

Exactly two months later, on March 18, 1229, Gregory wrote to the sisters of S. Severino affirming that their monastery was to be subject to no one other than the Roman pontiff for as long as they followed their rule and *forma vitae*.²⁶ The sisters were to receive all church sacraments from their diocesan bishop if he was willing to do this without irregularity. Otherwise, they were permitted to go to any Catholic bishop they chose as long as he was in the grace and communion of the Roman church. As a payment for local services, the sisters were to pay one pound of wax every year to the diocesan bishop. With their rule, *forma vitae*, and papal exemption in hand, Gregory now sought means by which the monastery could be more financially secure. In an August 4, 1231, letter to the Christian faithful, Gregory explained that the nuns of S. Severino placed their sufficiency in poverty and chose to be sustained by the alms of the faithful.²⁷ The papacy granted benefactors a forty-day indulgence from purgatorial punishment if they provided the sisters with alms.

Under the papacy of Innocent IV, the sisters were able to request, receive, and retain possessions given to the sisters of the monastery even if these goods were not immediately given at the time of a sister's profession. This meant that goods withheld from dowries, as well as goods willed to individual sisters after their monastic incorporation, could be retained by the monastery.²⁸ Again addressing the sisters as belonging to the "Order of S. Damian," Innocent IV wrote on October 18, 1252, to all the faithful encouraging them to give alms to the

²⁴ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 100.

²⁵ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 100.

²⁶ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 101.

²⁷ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 101.

²⁸ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 101.

sisters at S. Severino and rewarded them with a forty-day indulgence for their generosity.²⁹

On October 25, 1252, Innocent permitted the sisters to transfer their monastery to Passiniano.³⁰ He affirmed that their Order was instituted by Gregory IX when he was in a minor office according to the Rule of S. Benedict, the Institution of Enclosed Nuns of S. Damian in Assisi, and their own *forma vitae*. The sisters held possessions listed as their monastery with all of its appurtenances, lands, vineyards, woods and possessions that they held in a variety of places with all their accompanying lands, vineyards, fields, woods, rights of usage, and pastureland in wood and fields, waterways, mills, roads, and paths. The sisters were forbidden to leave their enclosure after they had made their profession, but were free to leave the monastery if they no longer wished to comply with its directives. The diocesan bishop was to provide for the consecration of their altars and church, and for church sacraments. The sisters could also prudently seek services from neighboring bishops and also bishops traveling through their area as long as no offence was given to their local bishop. When there was a general interdict, the sisters could celebrate the Divine Office without sounding the bells, but were to do so with closed doors, shutting out all those under the sentence of excommunication or interdict, providing that they were not the cause of the interdict. When an abbess died, the sisters were to appoint another abbess either by common consent or by a majority of the elders according to the Rule of S. Benedict. No bishop or other church official had the right to place the monastery under interdict; if they did, the sentence would be invalid. Likewise, no one was to commit violence against the monastery's property or the persons living there. To assure that the sisters would be free from harassment, Innocent wrote to the prior of S. Severino asking him to see that the sisters would not be forced to pay collections, tributes, and taxes on possessions that were demanded from secular persons.³¹

The documents from the monastery of S. Severino are critical to understanding the evolution of an Ugolinian monastery. The monastery was founded through the work of Franciscan friars who promised the local bishop that they would provide pastoral care and visitation to

²⁹ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 101.

³⁰ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 102–3.

³¹ Faloci Pulignani, "Documenti inediti del XIII secolo," 103–4.

the sisters. The visitor was to be appointed by Francis, his successors, or by the annual Franciscan chapter. Although the sisters were said to live in poverty, they were permitted to retain their mill and vineyard. We know that Francis himself visited these sisters and was pleased with their monastic lifestyle.

Issues arose when laity did not want to forfeit resources from the sisters' inheritances to the monastery. Reneging on Honorius's promise to the bishop to maintain the monastery without endowments, both Gregory IX and Innocent IV were bent on stabilizing the community with revenue-generating property. Gregory IX accepted the monastery with its property under the jurisdiction of the Holy See, selected some services that were to be retained by the local bishop, and encouraged the faithful to provide the monastery with alms. Since the property belonged to the Holy See, the sisters remained personally poor while benefitting from monastic endowments. As a papal institution, the sisters were exempt from secular taxes as long as they followed the Ugolinian *forma vitae*. During Innocent IV's papacy, the sisters were also able to contribute monies from dowries and inheritances obtained after their professions to the monastic endowment.

MILAN: S. MARIA OF S. APOLLINARE

On Sunday, February 11, 1223, the priests Conrad and Siebald, acting as officials of the Church of S. Apollinare located in Milan not far from the Roman gate, sold the tax-exempt church and a piece of land associated with it to Siro Morone, who was working on behalf of the Monastery of S. Maria.³² With the permission of Enrico Settala,³³ the archbishop of Milan, they agreed that a monastery be founded and built on this property for the "Order and Rule of S. Damian of the Valley of Spoleto next to the town of Assisi."³⁴ On November 2, 1224, Archbishop Enrico Settala, with the consent of the priests and

³² Paolo Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano: Documenti, sec. XIII-XVIII," *AFH* 17 (1924): 343.

³³ Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Henri de Settala," in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* 23 (Paris 1990), cols. 1227-1230.

³⁴ Concerning this monastery see Maria Pia Alberzoni, *Francescanesimo a Milano nel Duecento* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1991), 41-79; and Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Insediamenti francescani in Milano (secolo XIII-XIV)," in *Il Francescanesimo in Lombardia*, ed. Arnalda Dallaj, 70-73 (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1983).

canons of Milan, asked Cardinal Ugolino to give Abbess Giacomina, of the Church of S. Apollinare with its annexed housing and lands, the permission needed to erect a monastery of the Order of S. Damiano for an annual tithe of wax.³⁵ Guglielmo, provost of S. Nazaro in Milan, and Father Leone of the Friars Minor, by command of the archbishop, proceeded with the formal erection of the monastery on November 8, 1224.³⁶

On February 4, 1225, Archbishop Settala, labeling the new community as "Poor, Enclosed Women," confirmed the above action. The archbishop stated that the monastery was erected with the permission of the priests of Milan and the agreement of Cardinal Ugolino, and affirmed that the sisters were given the Church of S. Apollinare and its benefices according to the boundaries set in the civil contract. This agreement was made, according to the archbishop, so that Abbess Giacomina and her sisters "devoted to Christ our God could serve the Lord in poverty according to the *forma vitae* of the Poor Enclosed Ladies living in the valley of Spoleto that was given to these ladies by Cardinal Ugolino with the authority of the pope."³⁷ It is interesting to note that the archbishop recognized Ugolino as the founder of the "Poor, Enclosed Women" and that the Franciscans represented only one of a number of founding agents.

The archbishop released the monastery and its sisters from episcopal jurisdiction in spiritual and temporal matters, reserving for himself nothing other than the right to dedicate the church, consecrate its altars, and bless the abbess and nuns when needed. If however, in the future, the sisters decided not to follow the form of religious life that they had been given and did not correct themselves despite frequent warnings, the monastery would revert to diocesan jurisdiction. Among the papal, diocesan, and lay witnesses to the archbishop's decree, not one Friar Minor was represented. On September 19, 1225, the clerics and beneficiaries of S. Apollinare confirmed the above donation.³⁸

The piece of land that had been ample for the Church of S. Apollinare and a small rectory was not large enough to sustain a monastery of nuns. On January 26, 1226, Guglielmo Pontirolo sold land annexed to the S. Apollinare property to Lady Giacomina "abbess of the Mon-

³⁵ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 345.

³⁶ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 345.

³⁷ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 345-46.

³⁸ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 346-47.

astery of S. Maria of the Order of Spoleto.”³⁹ He promised Giacoma that when his younger brothers, who were under the age of fourteen, became of age, he would also have them confirm this bill of sale within one month if this was requested by an abbess of the monastery. Otherwise, when the younger siblings reached the age of twenty, they would confirm the sale as a matter of course. If the minors refused to comply with the agreement, Guglielmo promised to pay the monastery one hundred pounds of Milanese silver denarii in addition to any damages incurred by the monastery.

On May 14, 1226, the nuns at S. Apollinare received a letter from Pope Honorius addressing them as “The Order of Poor Nuns in Tuscany.”⁴⁰ In this letter, the property rights given to the sisters by Archbishop Settala with all their appurtenances, liberties, and immunities, were canonically confirmed. Three months later, on August 16, 1226, Honorius officially transferred the priests of the Church of S. Apollinare to S. Giovanni in Brolio.⁴¹

As was the custom, the sisters in Milan wrote to Cardinal Ugolino to congratulate him on his elevation to the papacy. Ugolino, now Gregory IX, wrote a July 28, 1227, letter thanking them for their prayers and entrusting them to the care of Brother Pacifico of the Friars Minor.⁴² But all was not well in Milan, and Gregory began his pontificate with a flurry of letters addressing the stabilization of the Milanese monastery. On August 4, 1227, Gregory wrote to the archbishop of Milan stating that the sisters were reporting that the priests of S. Apollinare had still not transferred to S. Giovanni, but were, rather, wandering about the property.⁴³ Gregory demanded that the archbishop fix the situation with sanctions, if necessary, against the recalcitrant priests. The next day, Gregory wrote to the podestà and counsels of Milan asking that they give the Poor Sisters of the Monastery of S. Maria at S. Apollinare their protection.⁴⁴ He also addressed the abbess and sisters of S. Apollinare agreeing with a decision that the sisters had made to sell a monastic benefice for the piece of land that adjoined their property,⁴⁵

³⁹ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 347–48.

⁴⁰ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 348–49.

⁴¹ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 349.

⁴² Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 349–50.

⁴³ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 350.

⁴⁴ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 350–51.

⁴⁵ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 351.

a decision later confirmed in a civil document enacted by Guglielmo Pontirolo on September 9, 1227.⁴⁶

With the hope that the clerical issue would be rectified locally, Gregory concerned himself with adequately endowing the Milanese monastery. To this end, he wrote a circular letter to the faithful in Lombardy on November 3, 1227, asking them to care for "the Poor, Enclosed Nuns." According to the pope, the alms that were given to them by the Christian faithful were not always able to be delivered to the monastery. This, according to Gregory, was "a completely barbarous state of affairs since they cannot live without the help of alms." Gregory asked that the citizens permit the messengers of the nuns to take alms to the sisters without being forced to pay local tolls. "Not only," Gregory insisted, "ought you not impede outside alms for these women, but you also should add to them liberally from your own goods." Moreover, Gregory pleaded, in order to protect the piety of these women, the Lombardy citizens were to erect statutes legislating that every person of power and authority should defend the sisters against the attacks of evil doers. In return, the citizens would receive not only the benefit of the sisters' prayers, but also papal favor.⁴⁷

In an attempt to address the sisters' hunger, Archbishop Enrico Settala, at Gregory's insistence, gave Friar Martin, the receiving agent for the Milanese sisters, a vegetable garden that had belonged to the priests of S. Apollinare.⁴⁸ Gregory IX immediately confirmed this donation on April 28, 1228, so that the sisters could begin planting.⁴⁹ With the appointment of a new bishop of Milan, Gregory wrote a February 27, 1230, letter to assure the stability of the monastery, asking the bishop-elect not only to care for the sisters personally, but also to encourage others to provide alms.⁵⁰ On the same day, Gregory wrote to the mayor and counsel in Milan also asking them to defend and generously provide for the monastery.⁵¹ So that all would be clear during the transfer of power, Gregory wrote a March 1, 1230, letter to the nuns of S. Apollinare affirming the canonical establishment of the monastery as well as the Church of S. Apollinare with all its benefices.⁵²

⁴⁶ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 351.

⁴⁷ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 352.

⁴⁸ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 352.

⁴⁹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 352–53.

⁵⁰ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 352–53.

⁵¹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 352–53.

⁵² Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 354.

On May 24, 1231, Guglielmo Rizzoli, the new archbishop of Milan, with the consent of his canons, confirmed the exemptions given to the sisters, who he referred to as the "Poor Order of Nuns."⁵³ Further in his letter, he stated that these sisters were living "according to the form of the Poor, Enclosed Ladies handed down by Lord Ugolino." At the request of the nuns, evidently nervous about their position vis-à-vis their new bishop, Gregory IX confirmed these exemptions yet again on July 1, 1231.⁵⁴ On February 17, 1233, Gregory again sent a circular letter to the laity of Lombardy asking for their generosity and promising them "an indulgence of forty days from penance for those who would go to the monastery with devotion in order to give alms, or who would send something to the sisters from their own goods."⁵⁵

Gregory knew that the alms of Milan would not be sufficient to support the regular operating costs of the monastery. On February 18, 1233, he wrote to the archdiocesan treasurer informing him that the papacy had decided to concede to the Monastery of Poor, Enclosed Nuns of S. Maria in Milan, the Hospital of S. Biagio in Monza, which had belonged to the Roman church, with all its benefices.⁵⁶ Gregory petitioned the treasurer to assign a procurator to the abbess and nuns of the monastery to take possession of the hospital and to defend it with the appropriate documentation. On the same day, Gregory wrote to the "Poor, Enclosed Ladies" of Milan saying that he had been concerned about their state and had given it careful consideration.⁵⁷ In response, Gregory conceded to them the goods of the Hospital of S. Biagio, which was under the direct control of the Roman church, and which, as Gregory had heard, was lax in the practice of proper hospitality. Because of this, Gregory decreed that the hospital should be handed over to pious use, namely the care of those "who have chosen to follow the Poor Christ as paupers" so that utter necessity would not force them to return to the world because of a lack of charity. Following this, Gregory also wrote to the mayor and commune of Monza asking them to defend the nuns along with their newly acquired Hospital of S. Biagio.⁵⁸

⁵³ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 354–56.

⁵⁴ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 356.

⁵⁵ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 356–57.

⁵⁶ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 357.

⁵⁷ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 357.

⁵⁸ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 357–58.

On January 9, 1235, Enrico Todeschi, a citizen of Milan, willed twenty soldi to the Friars Minor of S. Francis and his goods to the ladies of the Order of S. Damian of Apollinare.⁵⁹ His daughter, Beldietta, had joined the monastery. On February 12, 1235, the archbishop conceded to Brother Martin of the Friars Minor some land next to the Church of S. Apollinare for the use of the nuns.⁶⁰ In addition, on March 28, 1235, Gregory IX ordered that the benefices of clerics who had once lived at S. Apollinare should be returned to S. Apollinare at the death of these clerics—the clerics had never moved to Brolio much to the chagrin of Gregory IX.⁶¹ In a March 31, 1235, missive, Gregory asked the archbishop of Milan to uphold this order.⁶² With all this in place, Gregory again wrote to the sisters of Milan on April 7, 1235, assuring them of the archbishop's support.⁶³

During the process of the transfer of power, the sisters reminded Gregory that Archbishop Enrico Settala had promised to offer a public sermon at their monastery one Sunday a month so that the faithful might "extend to the sisters the hand of charity." Those who attended this sermon were to receive an indulgence. Gregory responded by writing to the sisters on April 21, 1235, confirming this episcopal agreement.⁶⁴

On May 5, 1235, with all diocesan agreements clarified, Gregory formally placed the nuns of S. Apollinare under papal protection by canonically establishing the Order according to the Rule of S. Benedict and the constitutions of the Enclosed Nuns of S. Damian of Assisi.⁶⁵ While Gregory was clear that the sisters were to be "enclosed," there is no mention in this document concerning the sisters' commitment to poverty. Yet, this papal commitment still did not relieve the sisters' problems. On May 21, 1235, Gregory again wrote to the podestàs and counselors of Lombardy demanding that they permit the alms given to the Monastery of S. Apollinare to pass without exacting from them large tolls regardless of any civil statute to the contrary.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 359–60.

⁶⁰ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 360–61.

⁶¹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 361.

⁶² Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 361.

⁶³ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 361–62.

⁶⁴ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 362.

⁶⁵ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 362.

⁶⁶ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 363.

The sisters had also not received the property of the Hospital of S. Biagio that Gregory had tried to give them in February, 1233. Finally, three years later on January 7, 1236, Raimondo della Torre, the archdiocesan treasurer, promised that he would bring the procurator of the abbess and nuns of S. Maria of the Order of Poor, Enclosed Women, into possession of this hospital in compliance with Gregory's mandate.⁶⁷ On May 7, 1236, Abbess Belvisio and thirty-nine of her sisters chose Brothers Guglielma and Giacomo, from the Order of Penance, and Brothers Rainaldo and Manfredo, of the Humiliati, to act as procurators for the reception of the Hospital of S. Biagio in Monza according to the wishes of Gregory IX.⁶⁸

Archbishop Guglielmo da Rizzoli died on March 4, 1241, and was succeeded by the Friar Minor, Leone Perego, who was elected on June 15.⁶⁹ Brother Martin remained the receiving agent for the monastery since on March 1, 1242, a sale is made giving the monastery rights to land next to S. Apollinare received by Brother Martin.⁷⁰ Predictably, these Ugolinian sisters flourished under Perego, and on August 11, 1245, document attests to the presence of another Ugolinian monastery in Milan, S. Vittore all'Olmo. This monastery was established in a house that had been abandoned by the Friars Minor, who had built a new friary near the basilica of SS. Nabore and Felice.⁷¹

The first indication of the pontificate of Innocent IV in documents concerning the Ugolinian foundations in Milan is a letter written on August 27, 1245.⁷² In this missive, Innocent gave the nuns of S. Apollinare permission to drink wine and eat even on days of fasting, except on Fridays. They were not to fast on Christmas day, on Marian feasts, and on the principle feasts of their monastery. On October 16, 1245, Innocent wrote to the general and provincial ministers of the Order of Friars Minor giving them the duty of visitation and correction of the Enclosed Nuns of the Order of S. Damian. Their duties were outlined as "instruct them in the disciplined life of the monastic rule, comfort them with preaching God's word, celebrate the solemnities of the Mass, celebrate the various parts of the Divine Office, provide church

⁶⁷ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 363–64.

⁶⁸ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 364.

⁶⁹ Willliell Thomson, *Friars in the Cathedral: The First Franciscan Bishops, 1226–1261* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975), 93–101.

⁷⁰ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 524–25.

⁷¹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 525–27.

⁷² Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 527.

sacraments and, when necessary, due to serious illness or death, for the visitation or consecration of altars or nuns, or for other just and appropriate reasons, you may enter their monastery with suitable companions—as many brothers of your Order as you consider fitting for the task.” Both the brother visitor and the resident priest could also have another companion in order to fulfill the above duties. For other reasonable purposes, they could visit with the nuns of the monastery at the grill or could appoint other brothers to this task.⁷³

Meanwhile, on December 18, 1245, in the refectory of the Church of S. Francis in Milan, Brother Leone, archbishop of Milan, asked some of the Franciscan brothers to deliberate concerning the case referred to him between the cleric Zanebello Zendadario and the nuns of S. Apollinare.⁷⁴ On January 11, 1246, the abbot of S. Vittore also weighed in on the matter.⁷⁵ Zanebello was attempting to separate the benefice of one of the former S. Apollinare canons from the Ugolinian nuns, claiming himself as the rightful beneficiary by reason of his profession as a canon of S. Apollinare. He argued that the benefices were due him as a canonically professed member of the Church of S. Apollinare and that the dealings with the nuns were executed when he was absent, ignorant of the matter, and not consulted. It could certainly not have been the intention of the papacy to confer benefits to the detriment of Zanebello who also possessed a papal letter investing him with this benefice. Since it was a papal matter, Zanebello argued, neither the archbishop nor his delegate had the right to intervene.

Zanebello's attempt was unsuccessful, and the abbot of S. Vittore sided with the monastery. In his February 1, 1246, brief, the abbot noted that the donation of the property to the sisters was made and corroborated by Gregory IX, and was clearly documented in the privileges obtained from the archbishops who had served Milan. The mandate was to be executed even though it was a “difficult yoke imposed on someone” out of devotion to the Holy See, since “what is pleasing to the prince has the strength of law.” Since the archbishop was simply the pope's executor in this matter, the abbot argued, he could not assume for himself the part of the judge, but could only give orders to execute what was commanded by the pope. The abbot imposed per-

⁷³ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 527.

⁷⁴ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 527–28.

⁷⁵ Sevesi, “Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano,” 528–30.

petual silence on Zanebello concerning the matter as well as the *pro forma* threat of excommunication leveled on anyone who might disagree or act against the decision, which predictably failed to impress the stubborn Zanebello.⁷⁶

On February 8, 1246, the nuns of S. Apollinare were among the Damianites who received notice that the Friars Minor could have access to their monasteries for defending them against fire, robbers, or for other reasonable and honorable matters.⁷⁷ The friars were also given permission to go to the doors, grills, and parlors of their monastery. Innocent affirmed in a May 11, 1246, circular letter to the faithful, Gregory's directive for the laity to visit S. Apollinare to give them pious alms in return for an indulgence of forty days.⁷⁸ On May 15, 1246, all Damianites received from Innocent the privilege of immunity from secular law.⁷⁹

Most controversial was a missive sent by Innocent that committed the Friars Minor to the direction and care of monasteries of the Order of S. Damian.⁸⁰ This included providing for the temporal needs of sisters assigned to them by the apostolic see, teaching and directing the sisters, providing the services of visitation and correction within the monasteries, and administering church sacraments. All this was to be done without the sisters being incorporated into the Order of the Friars Minor, and without requiring the friars to reside in convents attached to the women's monasteries. Innocent assured the sisters only that the friars were with them *pro tempore*, meaning that their service was voluntary and could not be claimed as a right by the sisters. Because the sisters were not incorporated, and were, therefore, not assured of the temporal and spiritual services of the friars, Innocent gave them permission to receive income and possessions regardless of statements to the contrary in the custom or statutes of their Order that had previously been confirmed by the Holy See or other persons of authority. Innocent placed the Milanese sisters under the jurisdiction of the friars on June 1, 1246, with instructions concerning the details

⁷⁶ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 530–32.

⁷⁷ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 532. See *BF* I: 388 for the text.

⁷⁸ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 532.

⁷⁹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 532.

⁸⁰ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 532–33.

of this task following on July 27, 1246.⁸¹ With these missives, the Milanese monastery received pastoral and temporal services from the friars, but without any claim to them for the future.

The friars, although strong-armed into Innocent's directives, were clear that they would not take on the burdens of the ever-growing numbers of Ugolinian monasteries. In an October 2, 1246, directive, Innocent tried to quell their concerns by ordering the archbishops and bishops of Lombardy not to erect monasteries of Damianites without the permission of the Franciscan provincial.⁸² In an attempt to make the S. Apollinare sisters financially secure, Friar Leone Perego, the Franciscan archbishop of Milan, conceded a hospital to them. Innocent confirmed this donation on December 18, 1246.⁸³

Innocent sent his own relaxed version of the Ugolinian constitutions to all the abbesses and nuns of the Order of S. Damiano in August, 1247, insisting that these new constitutions were necessary because of the problematic burdens of poverty and, even more importantly, according to Innocent, because there were so many dispensations given to the Ugolinian text that the result seemed to be not one, but many professions. There was no opportunity for appeal, since, Innocent warned, "nothing further can be gained from the apostolic see by any order, vow, or letter in opposition."⁸⁴ Regarding the financial needs of the Milan monastery, Innocent did what he could. On February 13, 1250, the pope again offered forty days indulgence to anyone who gave alms to the Milanese monastery.⁸⁵ On April 5, 1250, Innocent extended permission to the brother *conversi* who collected alms for the monastery to attend religious services during times of interdict,⁸⁶ and on August 11, 1250, he extended this permission to include the household members of the nuns.⁸⁷

An interesting legal brief dated June 12, 1251, documents the ever-continuing problems with the property of Zanebello.⁸⁸ In the end,

⁸¹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 533. See *BF* I:420 for the text.

⁸² Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 533.

⁸³ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 533.

⁸⁴ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 533. For the text of Innocent's constitutions see *BF* I: 476–83.

⁸⁵ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 534.

⁸⁶ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 534.

⁸⁷ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 535–36.

⁸⁸ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 534–35.

Zanebello had continued to live on the church property and still enjoyed his adjoining vegetable garden. In 1251, he and his brother, Ugo, finally donated the property to the monastery, with the condition that the donation was to be effective only after their death. Innocent was definitely not happy about this state of affairs, as he feared that the canons might try to retain the church even after the death of the two brother priests. He decreed on July 15, 1251, that the possessions held by the brothers would be the rightful property of S. Apollinare upon their death, and that the sisters could not be drawn into legal cases outside the city of Milan.⁸⁹ On July 17, 1251, Innocent confirmed the possessions already held by the Milanese monastery as well as those that would be offered in the future, and ordered the authorities in both Milan and Monza, the location of Zanebello's bishop, not to threaten the possessions of the monastery.⁹⁰

S. Apollinare was not only endowed, but Innocent was doing everything possible to secure its further endowment. The goal was not to promote the poverty of the nuns, but to endow the monastery in such a way that poverty would no longer place the Milan monastery in financial jeopardy. This being said, however, Innocent knew that S. Apollinare could not grow without limit. On August 4, 1251, the sisters were ordered not to house any more than seventy nuns.⁹¹

Much can be learned regarding church and civil interests by studying the Milanese documentation. The monastery began with a secular agent working with the Milanese bishop in service of some Milanese women to secure property for the building of a monastery. The property under question belonged to the canons of the Church of S. Apollinare. Eventually, as the monastery expanded and purchased adjacent plots of land, complications arose when the secular clergy refused to release the rights to their property, and when secular persons demanded tolls for goods that were being transported to the monastery as alms.

Under Gregory IX, Innocent IV, and the Franciscan archbishop of Milan, Leone Perego, there is a concerted effort to fund the monastic endowment. This was done through land grants, alms, and willed benefices. The reception of these properties and alms, however, in Milan is a tortured process, and there is a concerted effort among both secular

⁸⁹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 536.

⁹⁰ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 537–38.

⁹¹ Sevesi, "Il monastero delle Clarisse in S. Apollinare di Milano," 538.

clerics and laity to work against the support of papal initiatives. Meanwhile, Innocent IV relaxed provisions in the sisters' constitutions to allow a broad range of services from the Friars Minor without giving them any charismatic claim to these services.

TRENT

The first mention of a Ugolinian monastery in Trent is in documents from May and June, 1228, in which Gregory IX asked Bishop Gerardo of Cremona to give a local female monastery the Church of S. Michael.⁹² The Trent monastery is named in the August 18, 1228, circular letter sent by Cardinal Rainaldo at the beginning of Gregory IX's papacy, announcing his new role as cardinal protector of the Ugolinian sisters, and Brother Philip's role as their visitor.⁹³ On September 8, 1229, Bishop Gerard of Trent gathered with his chapter at the order of Pope Gregory IX. Representing Gregory in his role as the receiving agent for Abbess Palmeria and the community of the Poor Ladies in Trent was Brother Pacifico of the Order of Friars Minor. During the meeting, the bishop and his chapter conferred the Church of S. Michael with all its benefices to the sisters who lived according to the *forma vitae* given to them by Gregory while he was bishop.⁹⁴ Gerard is certain to make clear in his document that the sisters were not bound by any statement in their legislation concerning the inability to have possessions.

Bishop Gerard reserved nothing of the goods, possessions, or legal rights of S. Michael except for the dedication of the church, the consecration of the altars, and the blessing of the abbess and nuns as long as he and his successors wished to continue this relationship with the nuns. In return, he asked for the proverbial annual pound of wax. If the sisters did not follow their *forma vitae* or refused to submit to appropriate correction, the bishop retained the right to revert the Church of S. Michael to episcopal authority.

⁹² G. Polli, *Il monastero di S. Michele in Trento dalla fondazione (1229) al secolo XV* (Tesi di Laurea, L'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, 1970–71), 558–59; 561, as cited by Sabrina Tovalieri, “Damianite e Clarisse in Trentino e in alto adige nel XIII e XIV secolo,” *CF* 74 (2004): 567.

⁹³ Ignacio Omaechevarria, ed., *Escritos de Santa Clara y documentos contemporaneos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1970), 297–302.

⁹⁴ Domenico Gobbi, *Pergamene Trentine dell'Archivio della Carità 1168–1299* (Trent: Gruppo Storico Argentario—Biblioteca Cappuccino, 1980), 29–30.

Gregory wrote to the podestà and his counselors in Trent concerning the Damianite sisters on April 8, 1237, reporting that the sisters had complained that the civil authorities were harassing them with undue financial demands.⁹⁵ Gregory asked these officials to desist from this practice since it was not proper to subject religious persons to statutes that undermined their religious liberty. On July 4, 1245, Innocent IV asked clerics in Verona to intervene on the sisters' behalf to address these same complaints.⁹⁶ The copy of Innocent's letter to the Friars Minor concerning their care of Damianite monasteries from October 16, 1245, is in the archives from the S. Michael monastery,⁹⁷ as well as an October 21, 1245, document to all the abbesses and nuns of the Order of S. Damian giving authorized friars the right to enter Damianite monasteries in order to save them from fire, defend them from robbers, hear confessions, provide the last rites, bury the sisters who have died, make visitation, celebrate the Divine Office, preach for feast days and funerals, and visit sisters at the doors, grills, and parlors of these monasteries.⁹⁸ Wanting a more stable relationship with the friars, the sisters asked Innocent to commit them to the general and provincial of the Order of Friars Minor. While mouthing assent to this favor, Innocent reiterated that the direction and teaching of the friars was only *pro tempore*. While the friars were responsible for the visitation and correction of the monastery, the election of the abbess was to remain in the hands of the sisters. Because the brothers were not bound to live at the monastery, other priests would need to be recruited at times to provide pastoral services. For this reason, Innocent permitted the Trent sisters to have possessions and income in order to pay for these pastoral services, even though previous statutes of the Order had prevented this.

The Trent monastery provides a brief summary of the process of Ugolinian legislation for women's monasteries without a rule in central and northern Italy. A Friar Minor, working as a receiving agent under Gregory's direction, began the monastery with a group of women. The diocesan bishop relinquished his rights to property and power, but in the case of Trent, made clear from the beginning the intention that the monastery would be endowed. By 1229, the question

⁹⁵ Gobbi, *Pergamene Trentine*, 41.

⁹⁶ Gobbi, *Pergamene Trentine*, 46.

⁹⁷ Gobbi, *Pergamene Trentine*, 46–47.

⁹⁸ Gobbi, *Pergamene Trentine*, 47–48.

was not whether the sisters would remain radically poor, but whether they would remain obedient to evolving papal legislation.

In Trent, as in Milan, the sisters were burdened by tolls levied on alms that were donated to them. While the friars provided extensive services to the Trent sisters, these services were not secure and could be removed at any time. Because the brothers were not obligated to assign friars to live at the monastery, the sisters needed to be self-sufficient. This meant that the sisters needed resources to provide not only for their temporal needs, but also for needed clerical services.

OBSERVATIONS

The case studies above indicate the circumstances of four Ugolinian monasteries that did not request “the privilege of poverty” and evolved under papal regulation. Although each is different, general observations can be made concerning the *ordo* founded by Cardinal Ugolino. Properties for these monasteries were either leased from diocesan parties or were donated by benefactors. The papacy initially assured bishops that their rights would be protected by the sisters’ refusal of property, tithes, and burial rights—sources of diocesan revenue. This promise, however, was amended when Gregory IX gave the sisters the right to own property, and encouraged them to accept landed endowments. The Friars Minor were involved in the establishment of these monasteries as papal agents, and provided sacramental and visitation services to these monasteries.

Without endowments, the sisters suffered from insufficient funds and hunger. With the acceptance of endowments, however, came the inevitable legal disputes. Clerics who felt that they were being deprived of their rightful benefices challenged the sisters, while lay persons wanted the right to tax monastic benefices and dispute hereditary claims. In these local cases, the pope had to rely upon the diocesan bishop to intervene. In the cases studied, it seems as though bishops, unlike their clerics, were more apt to offer this assistance to Ugolinian monasteries.

In the case of S. Severino, it is notable that Francis welcomed differing forms of monastic life into his penitential vision. Although the sisters of S. Severino had the use of a mill and vineyard and were founded by Cardinal Ugolino, Francis rejoiced in the quality of their religious life and supported the friars who served the S. Severino mon-

astery. Francis, obviously, was not concerned to impose uniformity in the female monasteries under the care of his brothers.

By 1228, Ugolinian sisters were encouraged to endow their monasteries with their own dowries and inheritances. Given the tangled mess of thirteenth-century patrimonial law, Gregory IX's dismissal of the directive of the poverty movement to "go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor," resulted in heavily endowed monasteries that were frequently implicated in secular lawsuits. The good will of lay people, no longer edified by evident monastic poverty, had to be prodded through promised purgatorial indulgences. Damianite monasteries became spiritual centers for prayer and occasional sermons, rather than houses of women who gave their dowries to the local poor. Instead of benefiting the poor, donations were solicited for these endowed monasteries. Religious jargon concerning poverty replaced the giving of the resources of the rich directly to those in need.

It is important to note that the above case studies give ample evidence that papal and local decrees did not guarantee compliance. Clerics and lay persons who were given papal orders often ignored or outright rejected these directives, and popes, bishops, legates, or anathemas were often unable to enforce papal will. When Franciscan brothers were elevated to bishoprics, their arbitration had to be camouflaged to avoid the appearance of favoring women under the Order's care. Given these complexities, it is no wonder that many Damianites, as well as the Friars Minor under John of Parma, rejected Innocent IV's *forma vitae* with its expanded pastoral obligations.⁹⁹ While the friars were willing to be servants of the papacy, they were simply unable to manage the complex affairs and the accompanying risks of proliferating monasteries of Damianites.

⁹⁹ Concerning the rejection of Innocent IV's *forma vitae* see Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 89–114.

PART II

CLARE: HER WRITINGS

CHAPTER FIVE

READING CLARE'S LETTERS IN CONTEXT

The four letters attributed to Clare of Assisi and addressed to Agnes of Prague are documents of primary importance for the study of the early Franciscan movement and, in particular, for the history of early Franciscan women.¹ Through Clare's letters, one can ponder the thoughts, issues, evolution, and spirituality of the early Poor Ladies. Written between 1234–1253, Clare's letters, although spiritual texts, are also historical documents, and one can discern their spirituality more correctly and deeply if one appreciates their historical setting.

The Legend of Agnes of Prague attests to the correspondence between Clare and Agnes: "By her frequent and gracious letters, Clare consoled her [Agnes] maternally, reverently, and most affectionately, and enthusiastically encouraged her in her holy purpose."² Of this mutual correspondence, only the letters of Clare are preserved. The content of Agnes's letters is known only insofar as Clare addresses this content in her letters.

Important discoveries of manuscripts that include Clare's letters have eased doubts regarding their authenticity. In 1896, Dr. Achille Ratti, who was archivist of the Ambrosian library and later became Pope Pius XI, discovered a manuscript in the archives of the Basilica of

¹ This essay is adapted from my text, *Clare's Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001), 1–103.

² *LegAg* 4:3. The *Legend of Agnes of Prague*, like other medieval legends, was written to promote and inspire the Agnes cult, not as a modern historical account. This being recognized, it is also true that the author of this *Legend* was concerned with the veracity of his project. He was a friar of the Bohemian province living in Prague, probably in the friary attached to Agnes's own monastery, who relied on eyewitnesses that he referred to by name in his *Legend*. He wrote the *Legend* shortly after the death of Agnes, and many of the details found in the *Legend* are substantiated by other historical sources. In the prologue to the *Legend*, the author promises to write only about those things that he learned from credible witnesses. For a critical evaluation of the historical value of the *Legend of Agnes of Prague* see Jan Kapištrán Vyskočil, *Legenda Blahoslavené Anežky a čtyři listy Sv. Kláry*, trans. Vitus Buresh (Prague: Nakladatelství Universum, 1932), 90–93. All Latin references to the *Legend of Agnes of Prague* in this essay rely on Vyskočil's critical edition. Divisions of the legend follow the *Canonizationis Beatae Agnetis de Bohemia* (Rome: Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum, 1987), 214–46.

S. Ambrogio in Milan that contained the four letters of Clare to Agnes in Latin, as well as a Latin version of the *Legend of Agnes of Prague*. Ratti reported that he uncovered the Milan manuscript through investigating a faithful seventeenth-century transcript of it in the Ambrosian library. Upon examination of the writing and ornamentation of the older manuscript, he decided that it could not have been written later than the beginning of the fourteenth century. He hypothesized that the Milan manuscript contained a version of Clare's letters that was much earlier and more reliable than the manuscripts known at that time.³

Although Clare's four letters were first published by the Bollandists in 1668,⁴ and were therefore known before Ratti's discovery, the Milanese manuscript represented their earliest and most complete form. Clare's first letter was known before Ratti's discovery through its inclusion in the Hall manuscript of the *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals*, which was written by Nicholas Glassberger, dated 1491, and published in 1897.⁵

In 1915, Walter Seton, unaware of Ratti's work, published an edition of Clare's letters in his thesis *Some New Sources for the Life of Blessed Agnes of Bohemia*.⁶ Seton based his research primarily on a late fourteenth-century manuscript housed in the Royal Library of Bamberg, which contained a German text of Clare's letters. He also consulted a second German language Bamberg manuscript containing Clare's letters from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century, a German language edition of Clare's four letters in a fifteenth-century Wolfenbüttel manuscript, a fifteenth-century Dresden manuscript written in German, and a German fifteenth-century Berlin manuscript.⁷

From a note on the last folio of the first Bamberg manuscript, Seton postulated that this manuscript had been written in Nuremberg before 1380. About 1600, when the Nuremberg convent was dissolved, the manuscript was given to the Convent of Banz near Langheim in the Diocese of Bamberg. In 1802, the convent libraries in the diocese of

³ See Achille Ratti, "Un codice pragense a Milano con testo inedito della vita di S. Agnese di Praga," *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere* (1896): 392–96.

⁴ AASS, Mart. I:505–7.

⁵ AF 3 (1897): 184–86.

⁶ *British Society of Franciscan Studies* 7 (Aberdeen: University Press, 1915): 17–18.

⁷ Walter Seton, "The Letters from Saint Clare to Blessed Agnes of Bohemia," *AFH* 17 (1924): 509–10.

Bamberg were merged into the Royal Library of Bamberg.⁸ Through the Bamberg text, Seton was able to date the manuscript tradition of Clare's letters back from the Bollandist date of 1668 to about 1380, making their authenticity more certain.

Seton became convinced that the Bollandist's Latin version was a translation of the German texts, and that the German manuscripts were a translation of an earlier Latin text. In June of 1922, Professor Josef Susta of Charles University in Prague sent Seton a review of Seton's book that Susta had published in *The Czech Historical Journal*. While reading Susta's review, Seton learned of Dr. Achille Ratti's 1896 article that had reported a Latin manuscript of Czech origin that contained Clare's letters as well as the Latin *Legend of Agnes of Prague*.⁹

In examining photographs of the Milan manuscript, Seton concurred with Ratti in regard to its dating, postulating that it had been written between 1280 and 1330. By studying the *Legend of Agnes of Prague* in tandem with Clare's letters, Seton suggested that the Milan manuscript was written prior to 1328, for the initiation of Agnes's canonization process, placing the text within seventy-five years after the death of Clare, and fifty years after the death of Agnes of Prague. Because Glassberger's copy of Clare's first letter in the *Chronicle of the XXIV Generals* corresponds almost verbatim with the Milan manuscript, Seton postulated that Glassberger had access to early and reliable sources.¹⁰

A fourth Latin manuscript discovered by Dr. Krsto Stošić in the Minorite monastery in Šibenik, Dalmatia, contains the second half of the second letter, as well as the third and fourth letters. This manuscript, besides omitting the complete text of the first letter and part of the second, is not as legible as the Milan manuscript.¹¹

In 1932, Jan Kapistrán Vyskočil published a critical edition of Clare's four letters to Agnes of Prague.¹² After meticulously studying both the German and Latin manuscripts, Vyskočil concluded that: 1) the Šibenik manuscript was copied from the Milan manuscript;

⁸ Walter Seton, "Some New Sources for the Life of Blessed Agnes of Bohemia," *British Society of Franciscan Studies* 7 (Aberdeen: University Press, 1915): 17–18.

⁹ Seton, "The Letters from Saint Clare to Blessed Agnes of Bohemia," 510.

¹⁰ Seton, "The Letters from Saint Clare to Blessed Agnes of Bohemia," 511.

¹¹ See Krsto Stošić, "Naš stari rukopis o bl. Janji iz Praga," *Bogoslovna Smotra* 19 (1931): 223–29.

¹² *Legenda Blahoslavené Anežky a čtyři listy Sv. Kláry*, trans. Vitus Buresh (Prague: Nakladatelství Universum, 1932).

2) the Bamberg manuscript was probably influenced by the Šibenik manuscript; and 3) the Milan manuscript was most likely written in Prague in preparation for Agnes's canonization process.¹³

In 1978, in his work *Opuscula S. Francisci et scripta S. Clarae Assisiensium*, Giovanni Boccali reedited the Latin text of Clare's letters based on the Milan manuscript.¹⁴ Ignacio Omaechevarría, in his second edition of *Escritos de Santa Clara y documentos contemporaneos*, based his text on Boccali's 1978 work.¹⁵ The critical edition of Clare's letters in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series by Marie-France Becker, Jean-François Godet, and Thaddée Matura entitled *Claire D'Assise: Écrits* relies on Vyskočil.¹⁶

AGNES OF PRAGUE

Agnes of Prague,¹⁷ (1211–1282),¹⁸ was the youngest daughter of King Přemysl Otakar I and Queen Constance of Hungary. Agnes's mother

¹³ *Legenda Blahoslavené Anežky a čtyři listy Sv. Kláry*, 39–40.

¹⁴ (Assisi: Biblioteca Franciscana Chiesa Nuova), 410–47.

¹⁵ (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982), 22–23.

¹⁶ (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 79.

¹⁷ The following are helpful sources for the life of Agnes of Prague: Christian-Fredrik Felskau, "Agnes von Böhmen und die Klosteranlage der Klarissen und Franziskaner," in *Prag. Leben und Institution, Legende und Verehrung* (Nordhausen: Bautz Verlag, 2008); Jaroslav Polc, *Agnes von Böhmen 1211–1282: Königstochter—Äbtissin—Heilige* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1989); Alfonso Marini, *Agnese di Boemia* (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1991); Alfonso Marini, "Pauperem Christum, virgo pauper, amplectere: Il punto su Chiara ed Agnese di Boemia," in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 121–32 (Galatina: Congedo, 1998); Jaroslav Nemec, *Agnese di Boemia: La vita, il culto, la 'legenda'* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 1987); Kasper Elm, "Agnese da Praga e Chiara d'Assisi: Na Františku e San Damiano," in *Alla sequela di Francesco d'Assisi: Contributi di storia francescana*, 203–28. (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004). For background information in English see Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes from the Life of a European City* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997): 48–52; Petr Pitha, "Agnes of Prague—A New Bohemian Saint," *FranzStud* 72 (1990), 325–40; and Poor Clare Colettine Community, *Aneska: Princess of the House of Premysl* (Hawarden: Tŷ Mam Duw, 1996).

¹⁸ The date of Agnes's birth is not certain. Various sources suggest dates from 1205–1211. Because the *Agnes Legend* consistently refers to Agnes's age, rather than to dates, this uncertainty about Agnes's birth date makes it difficult for historians to pinpoint other important dates of her early life. Concerning the date of Agnes's birth, Jan Kapistrán Vyskočil says the following: "The year and date of her birth are not mentioned in the *Legend*, but the Bollandists give the date as January 20, 1205. For that reason, they say, she was given the name 'Agnes.' She was baptized by Bishop Daniel on the feast of S. Agnes, January 21. This, however, is an addition to the *Legend* made

was a sister to Andrew II of Hungary, who was the father of S. Elizabeth.¹⁹ Constance was the second wife of Otakar; the first, Adele, was the daughter of the margrave of Meissen. Otakar and Adele had four children. As time passed, Otakar grew tired of Adele, preferring the younger Constance, and, using the fact that Adele was a distant relative as grounds for dispensation, convinced Bishop Daniel of Prague to annul the marriage. Adele appealed to Pope Innocent III, but died before the matter was settled. Constance and Otakar had nine children. Otakar's oldest living son from this second marriage, Wenceslas I, became his successor.²⁰

Agnes's father was a master politician who secured for Bohemia its hereditary dynasty.²¹ Anxious to expand and protect his kingdom, Otakar betrothed his daughters diplomatically. At the age of three, Agnes was sent to Silesia with her older sister, Anna, who was to be engaged to Henry II, son of the duke of Silesia.²²

by Crugerius, perhaps to provide an explanation for her name. The *Legend* does not give any further particulars concerning her birth, but it does give other information about her life, important for determining the date of her birth. For example, the *Legend* says that she was fourteen years of age when she returned from Austria, and this happened in the year 1225; thus she must have been born in the year 1211. Pulkava places the birth of Agnes's older brother Wenceslas I in the year 1207 (*FRB*, V:121, 290); on the basis of this, Beda Franziskus Dudík, *Dějiny Moravy*, vol. V (Prague: B. Tempský, 1875), 167, claims that Agnes was born in 1208. This same date is listed by Jiří Palacký, *Dějiny Národu Českého*, vol. I (Prague: Stráz, 1968), 2, 346, in his genealogy of the Přemysl family. Walter W. Seton in *Some New Sources*, 45, gives the date 1205, following the Bollandists, saying that this date is unanimously accepted, but he does not offer any proof: Therefore, the most probable date of Blessed Agnes's birth is the year 1211." *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 18, 152.

¹⁹ *LegAg* 1:2.

²⁰ For further information regarding Agnes's family see Polc, *Agnes von Böhmen*, 11–18.

²¹ Kamil Krofta, "Bohemia to the Extinction of the Přemyslids," in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 6 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 434–36; J. F. N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), 16–18.

²² Agnes had a third sister, Blažena, known as Guglielma Boema in Italian sources. She and her son settled in Milan and were eventually given a home in the Cistercian abbey of Chiaravalle. There Blažena attracted a group of followers who marveled at her piety, humility, and virtue, and who credited her with miraculous healings. Blažena died on August 24, 1282, only a few months after the death of her younger sister, Agnes. The Chiaravalle abbey built an altar and a chapel above her grave. Soon after, her cult became convinced that Blažena was the female incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The Inquisition could not tolerate such claims and eventually discredited Blažena, disinterring her body and burning her corpse. Three of her followers also went to the stake. The Czechs, proud of their saintly dynasty and Hussite martyrs, have all but forgotten her. See Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, 52–53; and Polc, *Agnes von Böhmen*, 15–16.

Anna and Agnes were placed under the care of their aunt, the Duchess Hedwig of Silesia (1174–1243),²³ who arranged that the young Agnes be cared for by the Cistercian nuns of Trebnitz.²⁴ Anna stayed in Silesia and was married to Henry II in 1216.²⁵

Upon her return to Prague, Agnes was sent to the Premonstratensian convent of Doxany in Bohemia.²⁶ This convent had been founded in 1143, by Queen Gertrude, Agnes's grandmother, for the purpose of educating daughters of the aristocracy. Its nuns were daughters of the highest nobility, and the convent was known for its pedagogical excellence. It was here that Agnes learned to read.²⁷

Sometime during 1219–1220, Agnes was betrothed to Henry VII, son of the German emperor Frederick II. Since Henry was in residence with Duke Leopold VI of Austria, Agnes was sent to Vienna to begin her formation as queen.²⁸ Taking advantage of changing political situations, Leopold undermined Otakar's agreement with Frederick and negotiated a wedding between his own daughter Margaret and Henry.²⁹ This arrangement threatened Otakar's regional dominance and offset the delicate political equilibrium in Europe. Agnes returned to Bohemia³⁰ and Otakar declared war on the duke of Austria. Although Otakar I

²³ Vyskočil notes: "This was probably in the year 1214. About the year 1216, her older sister Anna was espoused to Henry of Silesia." *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 20, 152.

²⁴ *LegAg* 1:4.

²⁵ Vyskočil speculates that following Anna's marriage in 1216, Agnes returned to Bohemia: "This ended the education of Agnes's older sister Anna in the convent of Trebnitz; and Agnes, who was there to be educated with Anna, was returned to her parents." *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 23, 153.

²⁶ *LegAg* 1:5.

²⁷ Meta Harrsen postulates that a manuscript at the Pierpont Morgan Library was a gift sent to Agnes when Agnes was at the Doxany convent. See *Cursus Sanctae Mariae: A Thirteenth-Century Manuscript, now M. 739 in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1937), 8.

²⁸ *LegAg* 1:7–8.

²⁹ *Cronica Reinhardsbrunnensis*, MGH SS 30/1, 606–7. A few years after his marriage, Henry VII, unhappy with a wife ten years older than he and still not in possession of the dowry promised by Duke Leopold, dissolved his marriage with Margaret of Austria claiming it invalid because of his former engagement to Agnes of Prague. As Frederick needed to win the favor of Austria, he found his son's behavior politically unnerving. Seeing Henry's future as precarious, Agnes's brother, Wenceslas I, remained loyal to Frederick. Frederick II eventually took Henry, his wife Margaret, and their two sons as prisoners to Apulia. After some time, he freed Margaret and her sons, but Henry died a prisoner of his father in 1242. See Polc, *Agnes von Böhmen*, 36–37.

³⁰ *LegAg* 1:10.

negotiated an armistice with the Austrian duke, the Bohemian/Austrian conflict continued during the reigns of Otakar's successors.³¹

Meanwhile, Agnes was designing a plan of her own. The Franciscan spirit was welcomed not only by Agnes, but also by a substantial number of the royal family of Premyslids,³² including Agnes's cousin, Elizabeth of Hungary. In Eastern Europe, the Franciscan movement initially had its greatest impact on the upper classes of society, a phenomenon opposite that of Italy.³³

After the marriage between Henry VII and Leopold of Austria's daughter Margaret, Otakar focused his efforts toward obtaining a political alliance with England, again taking advantage of Agnes's marriageable status. Talks began which proposed Henry III, king of England,³⁴ as a possible suitor for Agnes.³⁵ These negotiations proceeded slowly, perhaps because of Agnes's reluctance, but more probably

³¹ See J. F. N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), 18–19.

³² John B. Freed, *The Friars and German Society in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1977), 59–60, states: "The Ascanians' patronage of the Franciscans can be explained in part by Otto III's marriage to Beatrice of Bohemia, the niece of the Bl. Agnes of Prague, the foundress and abbess of the Prague Poor Clares. Through her influence the Premyslids and their relatives became particularly devoted to the Poor Clares and the Franciscans. Margrave Henry the Illustrious of Meissen (1221–1288) established the nunnery of the Poor Clares in Seusslitz in 1268 in memory of his wife Agnes, another niece of the Prague abbess. Agnes of Prague's influence was especially strong among the Silesian Piasts. Her sister, Anna of Bohemia, founded in 1257 the nunnery of the Breslau Poor Clares, where she was subsequently buried. Anna's husband, Duke Henry II of Silesia (1238–1241), who had been killed by the Mongols at Liegnitz in 1241, was interred in the convent of the Breslau Franciscans. Herbord, a Breslau Franciscan, apparently served as the confessor of Henry's and Anna's sons, Boguslaw II of Liegnitz (1241–1278), Henry III of Breslau (1241–1266), Conrad of Glogau (1251–1273), and Archbishop Władysław of Salzburg (1265–1270). Their sister belonged to the nunnery of the Poor Clares in Breslau."

³³ The exact date of the friars' arrival in Prague is not known. Vyskočil proposes the following: "The Minorites, Agnes could have come to know as early as her stay at the Austrian court, and she certainly would have met them at her father's court, for they came there from the Thuringian court, where they were trusted counselors and confessors to S. Elizabeth and her husband, Ludwig. The chronicle of Fr. Jordan of Giano specifically mentions a certain Fr. Rodeger, who later became guardian in Halberstadt, identifying him as S. Elizabeth's teacher and adviser, from whom she learned how to observe chastity, humility, patience, vigils in prayer, and diligence in works of mercy. It can be presupposed almost with certainty that the Minorites made such a visit when Landgrave Ludwig came in 1226, to placate Přemysl and to reconcile him with Leopold of Austria. Their advice during such a mission was certainly needed." *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 49, 157.

³⁴ Vyskočil describes Henry III's proposal to Agnes as an "anti-French, political scheme." *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 32, 155.

³⁵ *Leg* Ag 1:10.

because Otakar preferred to wait for a more advantageous political alliance.³⁶

In 1231, Emperor Frederick II, who had been recently widowed, asked for Agnes's hand in marriage.³⁷ At this last proposal, Agnes appealed to Pope Gregory IX. In the end, her brother, King Wenceslas I, rejected the emperor's request. The *Legend of Agnes of Prague* 2:2, describes the dynamics of the scene:

And in order that she might more surely persevere in her resolution, which she conceived through God's inspiration, putting her hand to strong things, through trustworthy and discreet messengers, she made known her intention to the noble vicar of Christ, the Lord Pope Gregory IX. This felicitous pope rejoiced at the most generous devotion of the virgin, encouraged her by his gracious letter which he sent back by the same messengers, commended and confirmed her holy resolution, and with many spiritual gifts invited her to be his adopted daughter and accorded her his devoted paternal affection all the rest of his days.

The daughter of Christ was filled with spiritual consolation by these things that she received by way of reply from the High Pontiff, and immediately, fearlessly explained her resolution to her brother the Lord King Wenceslas I. When the king heard this, he was not without great anxiety, as would be expected, about how to excuse himself, and he dispatched messengers to disclose to the emperor what his sister had resolved to do.

It is said that the emperor replied to their message in the following manner: "If this affront had been committed against us by any man, under no condition would we desist from avenging the insult of such contempt. However, since she has chosen rather a Lord who is greater than we, we do not consider this to be any insult against us, for we believe that this thing has been done through divine inspiration." Therefore, with words of praise he highly extolled the virgin's good intention and sent her rich gifts and many relics, exhorting her to bring to a fruitful end what she had happily begun.

³⁶ Vyskočil speculates in this manner: "Why, then, did not anything come of these negotiations which had been opened, when in the letter of the English king there is expressed a desire that the negotiations be completed—when from his last letter it can be concluded that even Přemysl, who opened negotiations, lost interest; rather one can imagine Agnes's opposition. Precisely because Přemysl was not as much interested now in an English marriage as in an imperial one, he would more readily delay any further negotiations. Here the *Legend* elaborates by recording a miracle, but it does not invent the incident; for the author could have been well-informed concerning this matter." *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 32, 155.

³⁷ There are numerous documents attesting to Frederick's proposal. Gregory IX refers to it in his letter to Beatrice of Castille, *BF* I:164–67; as does Clare herself in *ILAg* 5. See also *Annales Stadenses* in *MGH SS*, 16, 363.

On November 17, 1231, Agnes's cousin Elizabeth of Hungary,³⁸ who was only a few years older than Agnes, died at the age of twenty-four. Elizabeth's care of famine victims, her founding of a hospital out of her own modest means for the poor and sick (1228), and many other stories concerning Elizabeth's saintly generosity were well known to Agnes. Elizabeth was canonized by Gregory IX on May 25, 1235.³⁹

In 1233, Agnes followed Elizabeth's example by establishing a hospital. The building of hospitals for the merciful care of the poor, abandoned, and ill, especially for incurable lepers, was common to the penitential spirit. Agnes placed the care of this hospital in the hands of a pious lay brotherhood, the Crosiers of the Red Star, who organized themselves with the help of the Friars Minor. This brotherhood was the first religious Order native to Bohemia and, already in Agnes's lifetime, extended its network of social outreach beyond the borders of Bohemia.⁴⁰

Agnes also built a monastery for women and a convent for the friars who would serve as its chaplains. She sent messengers to Rome asking for papal approval for her monastery and requested sisters who followed the form of life of the Poor Sisters of S. Damiano. With Gregory IX's approval, Clare sent Agnes five sisters from Trent.⁴¹ Since Trent was part of the Austrian Tyrol, these sisters spoke German, a language commonly understood in Prague.⁴²

On June 11, 1234, at the age of twenty-three, Agnes entered the Monastery of the Most Holy Redeemer. Seven bishops officiated and Agnes's brother, King Wenceslas I, and the queen were present for the historic event.⁴³

³⁸ Kasper Elm, "La personalità e l'operato di Elisabetta di Turingia," in *Alla sequela di Francesco d'Assisi: Contributi di storia francescana* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004), 189–202.

³⁹ See the canonization bull, *Gloriosus in Majestate*, BF I:162–64.

⁴⁰ For the history of this Order see Milan Buben, *Rytířský řád křižovníků s červenou hvězdou* (Prague: L. P., 1996), and Václav Bělohávek, *Dějiny českých křižovníků s červenou hvězdou* (Prague: Nákl. rádu Českých křižovníků, 1930).

⁴¹ *LegAg* 3:3.

⁴² Poor Clare Colettine Community, *Aneska: Princess of the House of Premysl* (Hawarden: Tŷ Mam Duw, 1996), 7.

⁴³ *LegAg* 3:3–4. Concerning the date of Agnes's entrance, Vyskočil suggests that "perhaps the best solution to this question can be made by using the papal letters as a guide. According to the pope's letter of August 30, 1234 (*Sincerum animi tui*), Agnes was already then in the convent, for the pope instructed her in that letter to recite the Office according to the Gallican Psalter and received her convent and hospital under his protection. On the next day, he issued a letter (*Sincerum animi carissimae*)

Agnes's role as abbess of this monastery brought early difficulties with Gregory IX over the question of poverty. With *Cum relictis saeculi* (May 18, 1235),⁴⁴ Gregory IX established Agnes's monastery as the beneficiary of the revenues that Agnes had handed over to the Hospital of S. Francis. This violated the ideal of living without property that was central to the spirituality of the earliest Franciscans. After Agnes leveled a series of protests, the pope conceded⁴⁵ and entrusted the direction and the financial resources of the hospital to the Crosiers of the Red Star.⁴⁶

Correspondence surrounding Agnes illustrates that she was truly captivated by the Franciscan ideal. Clare's tender affection for Agnes, whom she had met only through letters and through the description of messengers, united Clare with the missionary zeal of the brothers. Having been caught in the currents of noble politicking and intrigue, Agnes knew the emptiness of the propertied life, and desired to embrace with all her heart a *forma vitae* that would soundly preserve Francis and Clare's ideal of living without property. Both she and Clare received their wish when Innocent IV approved Clare's *forma vitae*⁴⁷ on August 9, 1253, just two days before Clare's death.

Agnes outlived Clare by thirty years. As she grew older, the political situation in her beloved Bohemia became more and more precarious. Ecclesiastics repeatedly attempted to persuade Agnes to accept property and revenues in order to protect her from the destitution that falls to the poor during times of war and famine. Knowing well the consequences, Agnes and her sisters steadfastly rejected these privileges.⁴⁸

in which he instructed John, the provincial of Saxony, and Thomas, the custodian in Bohemia, to make Agnes the abbess of the convent of S. Francis. Before this date, there was no mention of Agnes in the pope's letters, but in 1234, suddenly four letters in succession were written concerning Agnes. From this it can be concluded that in that year, at Pentecost, Agnes entered the convent." *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 61, 158.

⁴⁴ BF I:156.

⁴⁵ This retraction can be seen by examining the differences between *Prudentibus Virginibus* issued on July 25, 1235 (BF I:171–72) and *Prudentibus Virginibus* issued on April 14, 1237 (BF I:215–16).

⁴⁶ See *Omnipotens Deus*, CDB III:195–98. On the juridical dealings concerning Agnes's royal dowry see Joan Mueller, "Agnes of Prague and the Juridical Implications of the Privilege of Poverty," *FS* (2000): 261–87.

⁴⁷ *Solet annuere*, BF I:671–78.

⁴⁸ *LegAg* 5:1.

Although Agnes repeatedly used her influence to try to insure peace and stability for her beloved Bohemia, her nephew, King Otakar II's hunger for power and possessions, and his propensity to achieve these ends by means of despotic cruelty, eventually undermined political discretion. Despite warnings from his aunt, and despite a lack of solid allegiance from the Bohemian nobility, Otakar made war against Rudolph of Hapsburg and died in battle on August 26, 1278.⁴⁹ Rudolph entrusted Otto, the margrave of Brandenburg and a grandnephew of Agnes, with Bohemia, but he misused his power, destroying and plundering royal and ecclesiastical property and kept the king's widow, Cunegunda, and her three children imprisoned in a castle in northern Bohemia.⁵⁰

Famine, epidemics, and incessant warfare followed in Bohemia, and Agnes's convent became a refuge for the sick and hungry as well as a stronghold of Bohemian pride. There were floods that, along with bringing hardship and disease to an already stressed population, prohibited the mills from operating. Inflation soared. Meat, fish, cheese, eggs, and grain products were difficult to find. Some reports speak about robberies, armed assaults, murders, blood feuds, terrible hunger, mass graves, and even cannibalism. Agnes, who had chosen to live without property against the wishes of those who wanted to protect her nobility from the plight of the poor, now shared in the plight of the destitute and oppressed.⁵¹

On March 2, 1282, Agnes died in her convent in Prague exhausted by hunger, like so many other Bohemians.⁵² Bonagracia Tielci, the minister general of the Friars Minor, said her funeral and was accompanied by a great multitude of the poor, diseased, and hungry.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Kamil Krofta, "Bohemia to the Extinction of the Přemyslids," in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 6, *Victory of the Papacy*, 439–40 (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

⁵⁰ Polc, *Agnes von Böhmen*, 136–39.

⁵¹ *LegAg* 5:3–4. See also Polc, *Agnes von Böhmen*, 139–41.

⁵² *LegAg* 11:1. From 1281 until the middle of 1282 there was a severe famine in Bohemia. *LegAg* 15:5 states that more than three hundred thousand people died. Vyskočil, *Legenda Blahoslavené*, note 282, 176, writes: "Really there was a famine followed by a pestilence in Bohemia as a result of revolts and civil wars, but this famine came in 1281 and lasted until the middle of 1282. This date was established by Palacký on the basis of the consensus of chroniclers; all the ancient chroniclers speak of the horrors of famine and pestilence in those years."

⁵³ *LegAg* 12:1–4.

Although beatified by Pope Pius IX in 1874,⁵⁴ it was not until November 12, 1989, that Agnes was canonized by Pope John Paul II.⁵⁵ John Paul II had asked to come to Czechoslovakia in order to canonize the thirteenth-century Bohemian princess, but the Communist government refused permission. Although the canonization was held in Rome, the ramifications were felt in Prague. The people of Prague took to the streets praying before the statue of Agnes in Wenceslas Square and singing hymns. The Communist government resigned on the last day of the novena to S. Agnes. In the experience of many people in Prague, seven hundred years after her death, Agnes, the peacemaker, who had once been the royal hope for Bohemians under foreign domination, had come to the aid of her people again.⁵⁶

CLARE'S LETTERS IN CONTEXT

Clare's medieval Franciscan culture permeates her letters. In order to understand more fully Clare's use of scripture passages, her improvisations on the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome*, and her references to Agnes of Prague's concerns, Clare's letters need to be studied in context. The reader of these letters wonders why Clare used particular scripture passages, what her source was for the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome*, and what the issues were that undergird her letters to Agnes of Prague.

Although no source analysis will satisfactorily answer all contemporary questions, rushing into a hermeneutic on Clare's letters without pondering the clues she leaves in regard to their context invites misinterpretation. To render Clare's letters as purely spiritual documents devoid of history would be to reduce the early Poor Ladies to the realms of rarified, albeit blessed, obscurity. Studying Clare's letters to Agnes within the context of other contemporary historical documents reveals new perspectives of Clare, Agnes, and their sisters that command admiration and respect.

⁵⁴ The official documents regarding Agnes's beatification can be found in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, VIII (1874): 299; 406–24.

⁵⁵ For a summary of the history of Agnes's cause see *Canonizationis Beatae Agnetis de Bohemia*, (Rome: Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, 1987), viii–xii; 19–25.

⁵⁶ Poor Clare Colettine Community, *Aneska: Princess of the House of Premysl* (Hawarden: Tŷ Mam Duw, 1996), 1. See also Jonathan Luxmoore and Jolanta Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag: The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 291–92.

A contextual study of Clare's letters provides evidence for the problematic question of who wrote the letters. Certainly no friar, especially during the turbulent times in which the letters were written, would have composed these letters. The second letter is politically dangerous and, while Clare had little to lose in the quest for obtaining the "privilege of poverty," the friars in the 1230–40's would have been more vulnerable. The intimate knowledge of women's sources in the letters betray a woman writer, since these sources are not merely referenced or lifted, but are cited seemingly by memory with no small degree of poetic license. That a cleric would be so interested in women's source material and would have the freedom and interest to extrapolate in this way is certainly a much greater stretch than postulating that Clare and her sisters authored these letters. Clare and many of her sisters were literate, having come from wealthy families. Clare's mother was one of the wealthiest and cultured women of Assisi, and her skills were passed on to her daughters. The fourth letter does seem to have a different tone, but this might suggest that one of Clare's sisters took the lead in writing this letter since Clare was so ill. In short, there is certainly more evidence to suggest that Clare and her sisters wrote these letters than to imagine that one of the friars or a lay person did so. Not only is there absolutely no internal evidence for such a theory, but the tone and content of the letters argue persuasively against such a possibility. To think that one needs to introduce a cleric whenever there is female literacy in the thirteenth century is simply to misunderstand the cultural depth of the women involved. In many ways, the ecclesiastical freedom vis-à-vis the Catholic hierarchy exercised by thirteenth-century women, especially by Clare, and their knowledge of Christian sources remain unequaled in our day.

What follows is a commentary on each of Clare's letters. To refer to the complete text of Clare's letters, readers may consult the translations found in Part 3 of this volume.

CLARE'S FIRST LETTER

Clare's first letter was most likely written after Pentecost Sunday, June 11, 1234, the day of Agnes's entrance into the monastery at Prague. Elated that Agnes had rejected a marriage to Frederick II in order to embrace the following of the Poor Christ, Clare, who was in her early forties and had entered S. Damiano twenty-two years earlier, began her correspondence with the twenty-three year old Agnes.

The decision of the royal Bohemian princess to enter the Franciscan Order tipped the balance of power in Europe. Since her childhood, Agnes's father, Otakar I, in hope of advancing his own political agendas, maneuvered a series of marital contracts for his daughter. When Frederick II asked for Agnes's hand in the spring of 1228, Pope Gregory IX opposed this union for political reasons. It seems that sometime after his return from Jerusalem in 1231, most probably during 1233, Frederick issued a second request for a marriage with Agnes. Agnes rejected the emperor's proposal, founded a monastery and the Hospital of S. Francis in Prague and, according to her *Legend*, asked the Friars Minor to instruct her concerning the form of life of the Monastery of S. Damiano.

Key to all of Clare's letters is her salutation. It is typical in medieval salutation for a writer to praise the recipient of the letter while presenting herself with humility. This is certainly true in Clare's letters, and one must not base too much spiritual significance on Clare's use of adjectives that simply reflect the style of the age.⁵⁷ What is significant about Clare's salutations is that she places the theme of each letter at the very close of the salutation itself.

Following this convention, Clare addresses Agnes as "venerable," a common term properly used to address a lay woman of a higher rank than one's own.⁵⁸ She is the daughter of the illustrious king of Bohemia—a reference to Otakar I. Clare speaks of herself as the unworthy servant of Jesus Christ⁵⁹ and the useless handmaid (*ancilla*) of the enclosed ladies of the Monastery of S. Damiano. The term *ancilla* refers to a household servant and was commonly used to describe holy Italian thirteenth-century women who were employed as domestic servants. In a monastery, the term *ancilla* was used as a proper and formal description of the religious nun, *ancilla Dei* or *ancilla Christi*,

⁵⁷ In the salutation, "the modifiers themselves should be such as offer honor and respect, appropriate to the position of the recipient and conforming to his rank. But the modifiers describing the sender should touch a note of humility, suggest devotion, swear fidelity, or breathe forth the odor of charity." Transmundus, *Introductiones dictandi*, trans. and ed. Ann Dalzell (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1995), 63.

⁵⁸ Mary Bridget O'Brien, "Titles of Address in Christian Latin Epistolography to 543 A.D." (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1930), 122.

⁵⁹ Concerning the Christology of Clare's letters, see Fernando Uribe, "Il Cristo di Santa Chiara: Gesù Cristo nella esperienza e nel pensiero di Chiara d'Assisi," in *Dialoghi con Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Luigi Giacometti, 2–51 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995).

and was frequently used specifically to describe nuns whose role it was to perform domestic duties. Since we know that Clare literally performed the role of the common *ancilla* in her monastery, i.e., washing the feet of the sisters,⁶⁰ cleaning the mattresses of the sick sisters,⁶¹ bringing the sisters water,⁶² Clare's meaning, in referring to herself as *ancilla*, goes beyond the formal sense and describes her literally as the servant of her sisters.⁶³ In Clare's *forma vitae*, Clare outlines her concept of abbess as the *ancilla* of the sisters: "On her part, let the abbess be so familiar with them that they can speak and act with her as ladies to their servant. For, since the abbess is the servant of all the sisters, that is how it should be."⁶⁴

Clare wrote her first letter knowing very little about Agnes except for stories told her by the messengers who went back and forth between the monasteries. In her first letter, Clare described her sisters as "the enclosed ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano."⁶⁵ As the papal favorite of the Ugolinian movement, it is possible that founders of monasteries may have written to Clare, or that Clare, took the initiative to write those who were opening new foundations. Since Clare's commitment to poverty was a papal privilege given to her monastery, she did not project this love and commitment of poverty onto Agnes from the start. Instead, she stressed the papal injunction. The sisters were "enclosed ladies." In aspiring to be connected with the Franciscans, Agnes was founding an Ugolinian monastery. The primary papal focus on these foundations was enclosure. Clare admits this and signifies to Agnes that her monastery complies with this papal agenda. Later in the letter, however, she will also speak of poverty.

At the end of the salutation, Clare revealed her purpose in writing to Agnes. She hoped that Agnes might "attain the glory of everlasting happiness."⁶⁶ Agnes had given Clare joy insofar as she had abandoned the embrace of Frederick II in order to marry the Lord of all. Agnes had the right to be filled with joy because she had placed all

⁶⁰ *Process* 2:3.

⁶¹ *Process* 2:1.

⁶² *Process* 3:9.

⁶³ See Michael Goodich, "Ancilla Dei: The Servant as Saint in the Late Middle Ages," in *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy*, eds. Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple, 119–36 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

⁶⁴ *FLCl* 10:4–5.

⁶⁵ *ILAg* 2.

⁶⁶ *ILAg* 2.

her treasures in heaven and so was guaranteed a joyful, eternal life. Clare informed Agnes that she, along with people all over the known world, had heard the glorious report concerning both her conversion to religious life and her manner of life within her monastery, and that she rejoiced along with all others who “serve and desire to serve Jesus Christ.”⁶⁷

At first glance, Clare’s use of *conversatio*, conversion, and *vita*, life, may seem redundant. Marco Bartoli explains the difference between *conversatio* and *vita* in Clare’s canonization process in this way:

Pope Innocent IV wanted to proceed as quickly as possible to the canonization of Clare, and he wrote to this effect to Bartholomew, the archbishop of Spoleto, inviting him to institute a true and proper process to interrogate the witnesses about the *life, conversion, conversation, and miracles* of the lady of Assisi. The first term, *life*, meant that period which Clare had spent living in her father’s house, in other words her youth. The second term, *conversion*, meant her passage from life ‘in the world’ to life ‘in religion.’ *Conversatio* covered the period she spent at S. Damiano, and the last term, *miracles*, covered the proofs of holiness both before and after her death. In this way the sanctity of Clare was to be studied in four distinct sections, each with its own ideal point of reference.⁶⁸

Timothy Fry’s translation of the Rule of S. Benedict distinguishes *conversio* from *conversatio* suggesting a translation of *conversatio* as a manner of living particular to monastic life.⁶⁹ In his article, “*Conversatio* in RB: The Making of a Christian,” John Lawyer suggests that *conversatio* is a commitment to an entire way of life lived in common with others. It is a promise to be continually converted with a community of people who are also committed to continual personal and communal conversion.⁷⁰

Possibilities for the translation of *conversatio* include conversion, commencement of monastic life, monastic life, taking monastic vows, conduct, or way of life. Ginepro Zoppetti and Marco Bartoli in *Santa Chiara d’Assisi: Scritti e Documenti* choose the Italian word *conversazione* meaning “manner of life—especially a monastic manner of life.”⁷¹ The Becker/Godet/Matura translation, *Claire d’Assise: Écrits* uses

⁶⁷ 1LAg 4.

⁶⁸ *Clare of Assisi*, trans. Sister Frances Teresa (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 36.

⁶⁹ (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 458–66.

⁷⁰ *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 27 (1992): 13–27.

⁷¹ (Assisi: Editrici Francescane, 1994), 81.

the French term *conduite* meaning "conduct" or "behavior."⁷² Regis Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*⁷³ and Sr. Frances Teresa, whose translation is published in Edith Van den Goorbergh and Theodore Zweerman, *Light Shining Through a Veil: On Saint Clare's Letters to Saint Agnes of Prague* also translate the word as "conduct."⁷⁴ Clare seems to be expressing two realities in her use of *conversatio* and *vita*. Given the context of the letter, Clare distinguishes between Agnes's embrace of the Franciscan life and her admirable living of it within her monastery.

Certainly, Clare admitted, Agnes more than other women could have enjoyed public acclaim, honor, and worldly status since she was given the opportunity to marry the Holy Roman Emperor himself.⁷⁵ Rather than accepting this proposal, she spurned all this with her whole being and chose instead holiest poverty and physical want.⁷⁶ Clare's words are *corporis penuriam*, literally bodily scarcity, dearth, shortage, or want. Sister Frances Teresa translates the phrase as "physical hardship." Armstrong and Becker/Godet/Matura translate the word as "destitution." Medieval Latin had the word *destitutio* that Clare could have chosen. Although the stories of Clare and her sisters do illustrate situations of grave need at the S. Damiano monastery, "destitution" may be a shade more extreme than Clare intended. It also leaves little vocabulary for those whose lot in life is not voluntary poverty, but true destitution, a distinction noted by the early companions of Francis.⁷⁷ Francis and Clare, although they did not always exercise it themselves, advocated discretion regarding the degree of *corporis penuriam* embraced by their disciples.⁷⁸ Those who are destitute do not always have the luxury of this discretion.

Clare certainly was not promoting destitution as a goal for the Christian life, but was advocating a type of physical want where one's income for tomorrow was not guaranteed. The "privilege of poverty" meant that the sisters at S. Damiano did not know what they were going to eat from day to day. They were dependent upon the alms brought to the monastery and the work of the begging brothers. As

⁷² (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 83.

⁷³ (New York: New City Press, 2006), 43.

⁷⁴ (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 37.

⁷⁵ *ILAg* 5.

⁷⁶ *ILAg* 6.

⁷⁷ *L3C* 10:39.

⁷⁸ See, for example, *AC* 50; *3LAg* 38–41.

such, they were always in need and never far from the experience of the truly poor.

Clare noted that Agnes accepted a “nobler spouse, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will keep your virginity always immaculate and inviolate.”⁷⁹ This phrase pivots Clare’s text, poetically referencing allusions to the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* that follow. We will take Clare’s poetic references to the *Agnes Legend* up in the next chapter, but for now, it is important to note that Clare is referring Agnes to the story of her own patron saint, S. Agnes of Rome, who spurned the advances of a noble in order to be espoused to the noblest Lord of all, Jesus Christ. He is the one whose power is stronger, whose nobility more pure, whose appearance is lovelier, whose love is sweeter, and whose every grace is more elegant.⁸⁰ One wonders how many men had their advances rebuked with these words from the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome*? Certainly during the Middle Ages, women who desired religious life frequently made this their claim. Clare knew this feminine tradition well and obviously delighted in it.

Not only was Jesus Christ the highest and noblest of all lords, but his nobility kept intact the virginity of those he espoused. In this unique marriage, one’s virginity was not only preserved, it was also made immaculate. When you love Jesus Christ, Clare stated, a woman becomes more chaste and more pure. When you surrender totally to him, you become a virgin.⁸¹

Clare calls Agnes “dearest sister,” but then backtracks addressing her more formally as “most venerable lady.” Clare used the formal pronoun throughout her first letter, but even here teeters between the formal and familiar. In her following letters, Clare will address Agnes as a familiar. Agnes was Clare’s “dearest sister” because she was “spouse, mother, and sister of my Lord Jesus Christ.”⁸² Clare’s reference recalls Francis’s *First Letter to the Faithful* where, according to Francis, those who persevere in doing penance are “spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁸³ Note also that in the anti-

⁷⁹ *ILAg* 7.

⁸⁰ *ILAg* 9.

⁸¹ *ILAg* 8.

⁸² *ILAg* 12. Clare, following Francis, repeatedly uses these three terms, i.e., spouse, mother, sister/brother, to depict the relationship of “the ladies” with Christ. See Marianne Schlosser, “Mutter, Schwester, Braut: Zur Spiritualität der hl. Klara,” *Laurentianum* 31 (1990): 176–97.

⁸³ *ILtF* 1:7. Francis repeated the expression in *2LtF* 50.

phon, "Holy Virgin Mary," repeated throughout Francis's *Office of the Passion*, Mary is referred to as "daughter and handmaid of the Most High and Supreme King and Father in heaven, mother of our Most Holy Lord Jesus Christ, spouse of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁴

Clare understood the moment of one's conversion to be a moment of life-defining grace. Agnes is to "be strengthened in the holy service begun in you out of a burning desire for the Poor Crucified."⁸⁵ Clare will repeat this theme of relying upon the grace of one's beginning throughout her letters. In 2LAG 11, Clare invited Agnes "to be mindful, like a second Rachel, of your founding purpose always seeing your beginning;" while in 4LAG 19, Clare exhorted Agnes to, "Look closely, I say, to the beginning of the life of this admired one, indeed at the poverty of him who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger." The beginning of the Franciscan vocation for Clare and for Francis demanded that one sell what one has and give it to the poor. Practically this meant, in imitation of the Poor Christ, being content with poor housing and poor clothing.

One espouses oneself to the Poor Crucified because "he endured the passion of the cross, rescuing us from the power of the prince of darkness—by whose power we were kept in chains because of the transgression of our first parent—and reconciling us to God the Father."⁸⁶ For Clare, salvation through the passion of Jesus Christ occurs in three movements: First, Jesus' suffering and death on the cross; second, Jesus' rescuing us from the power of the prince of darkness; and third, his reconciling us to God the Father. One who is united to Christ through poverty is promised the kingdom of heaven as well as a hundredfold in this life.⁸⁷

What follows is an example of an early Franciscan sermon on poverty. Clare spins together gospel verses using the word, "head," as a pivot to transition her from one gospel passage to the next: "For foxes have dens, he says, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man, who is Christ, has nowhere to lay his *head*; instead, bowing his *head*, he handed over his spirit."⁸⁸ The choice of poverty is the decision to participate in the divine exchange. Christ "chose to appear

⁸⁴ FF 146.

⁸⁵ 1LAG 13.

⁸⁶ 1LAG 14.

⁸⁷ 1LAG 15–17.

⁸⁸ 1LAG 18.

contemptible, needy, and poor in this world,”⁸⁹ so that we, who are “utterly poor and needy, suffering from an extremely grave lack of heavenly food, might be made rich in him by means of the kingdom of heaven that they will indeed possess.”⁹⁰ Christ’s poverty has made us rich; we become rich by sharing in Christ’s poverty.

Agnes is assured of her heavenly reward because she has indeed sold everything that she had and gave it to the poor. She had stored up her treasures in heaven “where neither rust consumes them, nor moth destroys them, and thieves do not dig them up and steal them.”⁹¹ In his sermon for the sixth Sunday after Easter, S. Anthony of Padua, compares the moth to avarice. “Raamses signifies avarice, which like a gnawing moth eats away at the fabric of the spirit. ‘This gnawing moth is called *tinea* because it is so tenacious, and because it worms its way in, where it can bite and bite.’”⁹² Thus avarice gnaws at the spirit of the avaricious man to make him increase his abundance, but the poor wretch just gets hungrier the more he has.”⁹³

Because, referring to the beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3),” Agnes knows that “the kingdom of heaven is promised and given by the Lord only to the poor,”⁹⁴ she also understands that one cannot possess both material wealth and the kingdom of heaven: “You know, too, that one cannot serve God and material wealth, since either the one is loved and the other hated, or a person will serve one and despise the other. You also know that a person wearing clothing cannot fight with another who is naked, because the one who has something that might be grasped is more quickly thrown to the ground.”⁹⁵ The reference to “fighting naked,” a favorite of the thirteenth-century poverty movement, is taken from Gregory the Great’s, *Homilia in Evangelia*, which reads: “Therefore, we ought to wrestle with the nude, in the nude. For if a clothed person wrestles with a nude opponent, the clothed person is thrown to the ground more quickly, because he has (a place) from where he may

⁸⁹ 1LAg 19.

⁹⁰ 1LAg 20.

⁹¹ 1LAg 23.

⁹² Isidore of Seville. *Etymologiarum*. XII, 5, 11. Cf. PL 82, 449.

⁹³ ‘Sermones’ for the Easter Cycle, ed. George Marcil (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1994), 209.

⁹⁴ 1LAg 25.

⁹⁵ 1LAg 26–27.

be caught.”⁹⁶ Gregory advocated nakedness as the best protection for Christians wrestling with evil spirits who possess nothing of their own in this world. Liturgically this passage was used in Matins, 12th lesson for the Common of a Martyr, and is also referred to in *ICelano* 6:15, “Look! Now he wrestles naked with the naked. After putting aside all that is of the world, he is mindful only of divine justice.”

Of course, nakedness, as a symbol of poverty, carries differing vulnerabilities for Franciscan women and men. When Clare referred to Gregory's sermon in the context of her first letter, she was reminded of S. Agnes of Rome's nakedness before the Roman prefect. Because the Roman virgin, Agnes, is true to her spousal promises to Christ, God's providence covers her nakedness protecting her virginity, but not shielding her from ultimate martyrdom. For Clare, virginity (feminine vulnerability), poverty (nakedness), martyrdom (the ultimate *imitatio Christi*), and providence are related theological themes.

This disposing of one's clothing, one's worldly wealth in order to unite oneself with Christ, is the *sacrum commercium*, the sacred exchange or the holy business deal.⁹⁷ For Clare, it is always a good thing for human beings to do business with God because the deal is assured one hundred to one. Clare's reference was to Matthew 19:29 that guarantees not only a future reward but a present one also: “Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or lands for my sake will receive a hundred times more and inherit eternal life.” For Clare, “It is indeed a great and praiseworthy exchange: to give up the temporal for the everlasting, to merit the heavenly rather than the earthly, to receive a hundredfold instead of one, to have a happy, eternal life.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *PL* 76,1233b.

⁹⁷ The theme of the “holy exchange” is a frequent one in the history of spirituality and in the early Franciscan movement. Edith Van den Goorbergh and Theodore Zweerman suggest that the *sacrum commercium* is the theme of the first letter and outline a number of convincing similarities between Clare's letters and the *Sacred Exchange* namely: *ILAg* 11 and *ScEx* 21; *ILAg* 15–17 and *ScEx* Prologue, 19; *ILAg* 18 and *ScEx* 19; *ILAg* 21 and *ScEx* 23, 64; *ILAg* 23 and *ScEx* 31; *ILAg* 29 and *ScEx* 13; the theme of nuptial mysticism and *ScEx* 64. See *Light Shining Through a Veil: On Saint Clare's Letters to Saint Agnes of Prague* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 48, note 8.

⁹⁸ *ILAg* 30.

The theme of “the holy exchange” is found in the Roman liturgy both in the Divine Office and in Eucharistic texts.⁹⁹ Of particular liturgical interest, is the antiphon, “O admirable exchange! The Creator of humankind assuming a living body, deigned to be born of a Virgin; and, becoming human without seed, lavished on us his deity.” Echoing early Greek patristic theologies of exchange, this antiphon expresses the deification of humanity through the incarnation of Christ. The *Regula Breviary* used this antiphon for the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, February 2, Vespers: 1st antiphon.¹⁰⁰ The antiphon was also used for the Office of the Blessed Virgin, Christmas Season, Lauds: 1st antiphon; Prime: antiphon; Vespers: 1st antiphon.¹⁰¹

Clare closed her first letter by assuring Agnes that she would pray for her “in the innermost heart of Christ.”¹⁰² Medieval meanings of the term *viscera* (innermost heart) include the internal organs—heart, lungs, womb, and liver as well as stomach entrails. *Viscera* refers to one’s innermost recesses or one’s innermost being. A stained glass window in the Basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi illustrates Clare’s image perfectly. On one side, the Christ Child is being held on the breast/lap/womb of his mother, Mary, who is standing. On the other side, one sees S. Francis held in the same way within the figure of Christ. One can perhaps appreciate more fully the impact of this image on thirteenth-century Umbrian women if one ponders the experience of S. Angela of Foligno (ca. 1248–1309), who immediately, when seeing the image of Christ and Francis represented in this stained glass window, fell into a swoon signaling her mystical betrothal to Christ: “Then, on this second time, as soon as I had genuflected at the entrance of the church and when I saw a stained-glass window depicting S. Francis being closely held by Christ, I heard him telling me: ‘Thus I will hold you closely to me and much more closely than can be observed with the eyes of the body.’”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ For a summary of the development of *commercium* in Christian theology and liturgical practice see *LTK*, 1957 ed., s.v. “commercium.”

¹⁰⁰ Cf., Assisi, Sacro Convento, 694, fol. 275v.

¹⁰¹ Cf., Assisi, Sacro Convento, 694, fol. 386r.

¹⁰² *ILAg* 31.

¹⁰³ See “The Book of Blessed Angela: The Memorial,” in *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 141–42. For a synthesis of various perspectives of *viscera* as portrayed in this famous window in the Basilica of S. Francesco see Jérôme Poulenc, “S. François dans le vitrail des anges de l’église supérieure de la basilique d’Assise,” *AFH* 76 (1983): 701–13.

Clare closes by asking for Agnes's prayers for both herself and the sisters of S. Damiano. She was well aware that her letter was not a personal letter between herself and Agnes, but rather monastic correspondence from one community of Franciscan sisters to another. While they were united now in prayer, they would in the future meet "to enjoy the everlasting vision."¹⁰⁴

THE SECOND LETTER

On May 18, 1235, Gregory IX wrote two letters,¹⁰⁵ both addressed to the rector and brothers of the Hospital of S. Francis in Prague. In the first of these letters, Gregory IX approved the donations of Přemysl, margrave of Moravia, and in the second, the donations of Queen Constance, confirming that both donations listed the Hospital of S. Francis as the beneficiary. According to Gregory IX, these donations were given at the request of Agnes, with the agreement of King Wenceslas I.

While the royal Přemyslid family obviously understood Agnes's desire to establish her monastery without possessions, Gregory IX was nervous about the legal situation Agnes was creating. The properties given to the Hospital of S. Francis by Queen Constance and Agnes's brother, Přemysl, were substantial enough to warrant his attention.

In a letter dated May 18, 1235, addressed to Agnes and her sisters, Gregory IX contradicted the wishes of Agnes and her family by unilaterally conceding the Hospital of S. Francis with its appurtenances to the monastery. In doing this, he made it clear that he would not entertain legal arguments to the contrary. Moreover, the pope specified that the goods that had specifically been donated to the hospital by members of the royal family were also to endow and thus provide a regular and permanent income to the monastery:

We have decided that the Hospital of S. Francis situated next to your monastery, which you, daughter and abbess, built on land of the Roman church, is to be conceded to that monastery with its appurtenances forever. Also, we order that the same hospital with all its goods can not be separated from the monastery by any means or plan. Moreover, let the income of its possessions fall to the use of yourselves and those who succeed you, always recognizing the authority of the apostolic see.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *ILAg* 34.

¹⁰⁵ *BF* I:156–58; and *BF* I:158–59.

¹⁰⁶ *BF* I:156.

Gregory's letter contradicts Agnes's founding vision in a number of ways. First, he extended the ownership of the landed endowment from the hospital to the monastery, an action that Agnes and her family had carefully avoided. Second, he legally bound the hospital to the monastery, making Agnes and her sisters the co-beneficiaries of the large financial endowment originally intended solely for the charitable works of the hospital. Third, his actions virtually guaranteed not only the survival, but also the prosperity of both the monastery and the hospital. Not wanting to be responsible for destitute sisters, and certainly not wanting a daughter of Otakar Přemysl living in wanton poverty under the auspices of the Roman church, Gregory insisted that Agnes's monastery retain the goods that her family explicitly gave to the Hospital of S. Francis along with the revenues that these goods would produce in perpetuity.

Shortly after, on July 25, 1235, in his bull, *Prudentibus Virginibus*, Gregory IX established the Prague monastery as a Ugolinian monastery. One can appreciate the devastation that Agnes must have felt upon receiving this document. Her dream of following the Poor Christ by living without personal or communal possessions was being thoroughly undermined.

Moreover, let whatever possessions and goods that same monastery and hospital might now possess as their own legally and canonically, or which you will in the future receive with God's help from a concession from popes, the largess of kings or princes, an offering of the faithful, or in other just ways, remain firm and untouched for you and your successors. We have decided that these items under discussion ought to be clearly and specifically described as being that place, in which the aforesaid monastery is located, with that hospital and all its appurtenances; the estate of Hloubětín, with all the small estates pertaining thereto, namely Humenec and Hnidošice, the estate of Borotice and Dražetice, the estate of Rybník, with all its appurtenances, the estate of Rakšice, with all its appurtenances, and your other possessions, with fields, vineyards, lands, woods, properties held in usufruct, and pastures, with all other freedoms and their immunities regarding forest and field, waters and mills, and streets and paths.¹⁰⁷

Not content to give Agnes's original donation back to the monastery, to place the donations of Queen Constance and Margrave Přemysl under the monastery, and to insure that the endowments of both

¹⁰⁷ CDB III:144–47.

dowry and donations would return to the monastery, Gregory continued by exempting the monastery from all tithes: "Let no one presume to demand or exact from you a tithe from the fields that you cultivate for your own use, from which no one has yet taken a collection, or from the food for your animals." Beyond this, the diocesan bishop was obligated to give to the monastery from the resources of the people: "Let no one dare to exact anything from you under the pretext of custom or in any other way for the consecration of your altars or church, for making the holy oil or any type of church sacrament, but let the diocesan bishop freely pay for all these things for you by our authority."

Gregory's intention for the Monastery of S. Francis was to establish it as a prosperous, endowed, and well-regulated Benedictine or Cistercian-style monastery. He instituted the monastery with every ability to accumulate wealth, and with virtually no civil or ecclesiastical obligations to share this wealth in the form of taxes or tithes. Agnes had joined the Franciscan movement hoping to serve the poor in Prague by following the vision of S. Francis. Gregory IX's ruling jeopardized the charismatic foundation of her monastery.

Clare began her letter addressing Agnes not as "the most renowned and illustrious king of Bohemia,"¹⁰⁸ as in her first letter, but as "the daughter of the King of kings, handmaid of the Lord of lords, [and] most worthy spouse of Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁹ It is because of these divine affiliations, rather than her bloodline, that Clare recognized her as the "very distinguished queen, the Lady Agnes."¹¹⁰ Clare's address to Agnes echoes the terminology of daughter and handmaid found in the form of life that Francis gave to Clare and her sisters: "Because by divine inspiration, you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the Most High King, the Father of the heavens, and have espoused yourselves to the Holy Spirit choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy gospel."¹¹¹

Clare states the purpose of her letter as "the prayer that Agnes may always live in the utmost poverty,"¹¹² and begins by reminding Agnes of her founding ideal: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have

¹⁰⁸ *1LAg* 1.

¹⁰⁹ *2LAg* 1.

¹¹⁰ *2LAg* 1.

¹¹¹ *FLCl* 6:3.

¹¹² *1LAg* 2.

and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me (Matthew 19:21).” Agnes had become perfect in that she had indeed given everything she had to the poor. She despised “the heights of an earthly kingdom and the less than worthy offers of an imperial marriage,”¹¹³ and had “clung to the footsteps of him with whom you have been worthy to be united in marriage.”¹¹⁴ For Clare, religious perfection was the literal following of the gospel, “go, sell, give everything to the poor, and then follow me.” If Gregory IX had his way, Agnes would lose the perfection of the holy gospel. This, in Clare’s mind, could not be the will of God.

In her second letter, Clare’s *sacrum commercium* understanding of the “privilege of poverty” is again evident. In response to the fact that Agnes despised “the heights of an earthly kingdom and the less than worthy offers of an imperial marriage”¹¹⁵ and has “clung to the footsteps”¹¹⁶ of the Poor Christ, Christ will unite Agnes “to himself in marriage in heaven’s bridal chamber”¹¹⁷ Although Agnes had a papal directive, she was not to capitulate because only “one thing is necessary”¹¹⁸—her initial commitment to follow the Poor Christ.

But because one thing is necessary, I invoke this one thing and advise you, by the love of him to whom you have offered yourself as a holy and pleasing sacrifice, to be mindful, like a second Rachel, of your founding purpose always seeing your beginning... trusting in no one¹¹⁹ and agreeing with no one insofar as he might want to dissuade you from pursuing your founding purpose or might place a stumbling block in your way, preventing you, in that perfection with which the Spirit of the Lord has called you, from fulfilling your vows to the Most High.¹²⁰

In this passage, Clare encouraged Agnes to be “like a second Rachel.” The Franciscan contemporary of Clare, Anthony of Padua, offered

¹¹³ 2LAg 6.

¹¹⁴ 2LAg 7.

¹¹⁵ 2LAg 6.

¹¹⁶ 2LAg 7.

¹¹⁷ 2LAg 5.

¹¹⁸ 2LAg 10.

¹¹⁹ The translation of *nulli* is “no one,” rather than “nothing” for two reasons. First, the genitive singular of *nullus* is commonly used instead of the corresponding case of *nemo*. See Allen and Greenough, *New Latin Grammar* (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1931, 1998), §314, 2a. Second, the verb that follows, *vellet*, demands a personal subject. The historical context suggests that Clare is referring to Gregory IX.

¹²⁰ 2LAg 10–11, 14.

an exegesis of Rachel as an exemplary penitent from the culture of primitive Franciscanism preaching. In his sermon for Easter Sunday, Anthony wrote: "'Rachel,' i.e., the simple penitent soul 'weeps over her children,' i.e., her deeds, which having been created in sin were dead."¹²¹ The task of Rachel seeing her beginning as a penitent is also addressed by Anthony in the same sermon:

'And she saw two angels.' These two angels, the word means messengers, signify, in the moral sense, our pitiable entrance into and sad departure from earthly life. Whoever intends to examine carefully the beginning and the end of his life, should get out of 'Sodom,' i.e., the world and the stinking circumstances of sin, in order to save his soul. He should not 'look back,' i.e., return to his past sins.¹²²

Rather than follow the advice of Gregory IX, Agnes is remain firm in her original commitment. She is to go forward confidently and yet cautiously "so that even your walking does not raise any dust."¹²³ She is to follow her form of life tranquilly, joyfully, briskly, but also cautiously.¹²⁴ For support during this difficult time, Agnes is to rely on Elias, the minister general, and to value his counsel over the counsel of others as "more precious to you than any gift."¹²⁵ Clare's advice to Agnes regarding the directive of Pope Gregory IX could hardly be clearer:

Indeed, if someone tells you something else or suggests anything to you that may hinder your perfection or seems contrary to your divine vocation, even though you must respect him, still, do not follow his advice. Instead, poor virgin, embrace the Poor Christ.¹²⁶

Clare insisted that even the pope himself could not tamper with Agnes's vocational identity. Relinquishing her call to embrace life without possessions would be to put her very eschatological relationship with Christ in jeopardy. Although Gregory IX deserved Agnes's respect, any directive that would jeopardize her embrace of the Poor Christ

¹²¹ Anthony of Padua, *'Sermones' for the Easter Cycle*, ed. George Marcil (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1994), 70.

¹²² Anthony of Padua, *'Sermones,'* 70–71.

¹²³ 2LAG 12.

¹²⁴ 2LAG 13.

¹²⁵ 2LAG 16. On the role of Elias see Marco Bartoli, "Gregorio IX, Chiara d'Assisi e le prime dispute all'interno del movimento francescano," in *Rediconti dell'accademia nazionale dei Lincei: Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 35 (1980): 97–108.

¹²⁶ 2LAG 17–18.

should not be obeyed. Agnes's spousal union with Christ is symbolized in Clare's Latin construction: "*sed pauperem Christum, virgo pauper* [Instead, poor virgin, embrace the Poor Christ]."¹²⁷ The embrace of Christ and the virgin Agnes was protected and made possible through their shared poverty.

In offering Agnes this instruction, Clare placed her authority in the last will that Francis gave to her and the sisters of S. Damiano. In this will, which Clare archived in the very center of her *forma vitae*, Francis stated:

I, little brother Francis, want to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and of his Most Holy Mother and to persevere in this until death. And I beg and counsel you, my ladies, always to live in this most holy life and poverty. Guard yourselves carefully that you never, in any respect whatsoever, turn away from this because of the teaching or advice of anyone.¹²⁸

No doubt Francis had sensed that the sisters of the Monastery of S. Damiano would be subjected to great pressure to accept landed endowments for their support after his death. To support Clare and her sisters in this inevitable crisis, Francis wrote this last will for them. Francis is clear. The Poor Ladies were not to turn away from their form of poverty no matter who gave them other advice. Clare is simply reminding Agnes of Francis's words.

In the interim, Agnes is to contemplate the Poor Christ who "made himself contemptible" for her sake.¹²⁹ Notice that Clare's choice of poverty included not only the renunciation of personal and communal property, but also the acceptance of human contempt. The mention of contempt is particularly salient here since perseverance in the "privilege of poverty" was placing both Clare and Agnes at odds with both the pope and a growing number of Franciscan brothers. As Agnes had made herself not only poor, but also contemptible even to religious persons, she was to contemplate Christ who made himself contemptible for her. Although he was the most beautiful of all men, he became for the salvation of humanity, the vilest of all.¹³⁰ By following Christ

¹²⁷ 2LAg 18.

¹²⁸ FLCl 6:7–9.

¹²⁹ 2LAg 19.

¹³⁰ 2LAg 20.

in the poverty of ridicule and contempt incurred through faithfulness to her vocational identity, Agnes would receive "the glory of the heavenly kingdom rather than what is earthly and transitory, eternal goods instead of those that perish, and why you will live forever and ever."¹³¹ In addition, her name "will be recorded in the *Book of Life* and will bring [her] glory among men and women."¹³² Only by embracing the poverty of the contemptible Christ would Agnes truly be united with Christ in heavenly glory.

In giving Agnes advice, Clare spoke with the authority of one with experience. In Clare's process of canonization, Sister Pacifica testified:

She [Pacifica] also said that she [Clare] particularly loved poverty, but she could never be persuaded to desire anything for herself, or to receive any possession for herself or the monastery. Asked how she knew this, she replied that she had seen and heard that the Lord Pope Gregory of happy memory wanted to give her many things and buy possessions for the monastery, but she would never consent.¹³³

Following Sister Pacifica, Sister Benvenuta of Perugia also recalled Clare and Gregory IX's disagreement.

She [Benvenuta] also said that she [Clare] had an especially great love of poverty. Neither Pope Gregory nor the bishop of Ostia [Cardinal Rainaldo] could ever make her consent to receive any possessions.¹³⁴

Clare closed her second letter by reminding Agnes that her vocational choice was for the heavenly rather than for the temporal.¹³⁵ In keeping with her salutation, Clare referred to Agnes as a royal lady not because of her noble genealogy, but simply because she had chosen the Lord as her spouse.¹³⁶ It was this spousal relationship that made her also Clare's "dearest sister."¹³⁷ As a dear sister, Clare begged Agnes to remind her sisters to pray also for the sisters in Assisi.¹³⁸

¹³¹ 2LAg 23.

¹³² 2LAg 22.

¹³³ *Process* 1:13.

¹³⁴ *Process* 2:22.

¹³⁵ 2LAg 23.

¹³⁶ 2LAg 24.

¹³⁷ 2LAg 24.

¹³⁸ 2LAg 26.

THIRD LETTER

Knowing the entrenched position of Gregory IX, Agnes solicited the support of her brother, King Wenceslas I. In his letter, *Primum quidem excellentissime*, of February 5, 1237,¹³⁹ Wenceslas sided with his sister and demonstrated a clear understanding of the issue at hand. He began by thanking Gregory IX for the affection and favors that he had shown Agnes in regard to the Order of Poor Ladies, assuring Gregory IX of his own devotion and reminding the pope that this dedication lay in the considerable power and resources of his kingdom, family, in-laws, and friends.

Wenceslas then proceeded to the point of his letter. He told Gregory that his devotion would be better served if the Holy See granted Agnes's request. In other words, from the point of view of the Bohemian royal family, Gregory IX's response to Agnes's request for a Franciscan form of life could have political ramifications.

Although the letter does not exist, it is obvious from both Wenceslas's letter and from the replies of Gregory IX that Agnes also wrote to the pope with specific requests. Her letter(s) included: 1) the petition to disengage her monastery from the hospital; 2) a request for permission to hear Mass in the monastery choir; 3) a request for mitigations for clothing and fasting for the sisters at Prague; and perhaps, 4) an affirmation of Agnes's trust in the guidance of Brother Elias.

The letters of Agnes and King Wenceslas put Gregory IX in a quandary. On the one hand, Gregory wanted to place Agnes's monastery securely under the umbrella of his Order of Poor Enclosed Nuns who followed the Rule of S. Benedict with his own Ugolinian constitutions. On the other hand, he could not politically tolerate a breach with the king of Bohemia.

In the end, Agnes's strategy prevailed and on April 14, 1237, Gregory reissued *Prudentibus Virginibus*.¹⁴⁰ There are important differences between the July 25, 1235,¹⁴¹ and the April 14, 1237, versions of this papal bull. In 1235, Gregory accepted, under the patronage of Rome, "the Monastery of S. Francis in Prague with your hospital." In 1237, the text mentions only the monastery. The 1235, document established

¹³⁹ CDB III:182–83.

¹⁴⁰ BF I:215–16.

¹⁴¹ BF I:171–72.

Agnes's monastery according "to God and the Rule of Blessed Benedict." In 1237, Gregory IX established the monastery according "to God, the Rule of Blessed Benedict, and the Institute of Enclosed Nuns of S. Damiano in Assisi."

On the same day, April 14, 1237, Gregory IX wrote to the master and brothers of the Hospital of S. Francis. In this letter, *Omnipotens Deus*,¹⁴² he affirmed that Agnes had indeed given away her possessions to the poor: "Also for reasons of piety and compassion, she built and donated a hospital for the needs of the poor and sick, in which you have been bound to divine service." Most likely because the hospital needed a substantial endowment in order to pursue its charitable objectives, Gregory IX, with the blessing and recommendation of Agnes, gave to the brothers of the hospital the Rule of S. Augustine, not the Rule of S. Francis.

Having regained the intended independence of the monastery from the hospital, Agnes still remained uneasy. Although we do not have the letter, Pope Gregory IX acknowledged that Agnes wrote to him sending her correspondence through the prior of the Hospital of S. Francis in Prague.

You previously sent us a particular note through our beloved son the prior of the Hospital of S. Francis in Prague, a man of discretion and foresight, asking with humble supplication that we take care to confirm with apostolic authority the plan that was presented to us through that man under the sign of your seal and has been created out of the aforesaid formula and certain chapters that are contained in the Rule of the Order of Blessed Damian.¹⁴³

Clare's third letter to Agnes was most likely written in the year's interval between April 14, 1237, and April 15, 1238. From the papal response it is clear that Agnes requested that the Holy See confirm with apostolic authority a new rule for her monastery created out of the original form of life given to the sisters of S. Damiano by S. Francis, and the form of life of the Order of S. Damian. There exist seven papal documents, both juridical and pastoral in nature, which were prompted by Agnes's request for this new *forma vitae*. In the first, *Pia credulitate tenentes*, issued on April 15, 1238, Pope Gregory IX granted the "privilege of poverty" to Agnes's monastery. The juridical language

¹⁴² CDB III:195–98.

¹⁴³ BF I:242–44.

of the privilege is identical to that used by Gregory IX in the 1228 bull, *Sicut manifestum est*, sent to the sisters of S. Damiano.¹⁴⁴

Hence it is the case that, bound by your prayers and tears, we grant with the authority of the present document that you cannot be forced to receive unwillingly any possessions in the future. We do so having received your free resignation of the Hospital of S. Francis in the diocese of Prague that was conceded with all its legal rights and appurtenances to you, and through you to your monastery, by the apostolic see. For you, having scorned the visible and hastened to the delights of the invisible, are eager to avoid the obstacle of the thorns of temporal goods that is accustomed to arise for those seeking the unoffended face of God.¹⁴⁵

In the April 22, 1238 bull, *Vota devotorum Ecclesiae*,¹⁴⁶ addressed to the Dominican Order, Gregory IX gave the Dominicans the duty of visitation for the Hospital of S. Francis in consultation with Brother John, the provincial minister of the Order of Friars Minor. Needing to provide the hospital with local stewardship, Gregory IX, in his April 27, 1238 bull, *Carissima in Christo*,¹⁴⁷ gave the hospital to the Order of hospitaler brothers founded by Agnes.¹⁴⁸ The listing of properties making up the hospital's endowment is impressive and had already been outlined in the April 14, 1237 bull, *Omnipotens Deus*.

We have decided that these items under discussion ought to be clearly and specifically described as being that place, in which the aforesaid hospital is located, with all its appurtenances, the estate of Hloubětín, with all the small estates pertaining thereto, namely Humenec and Hnidošice, the estate of Borotice, with all the small estates pertaining thereto, namely Županovice and Dražetice, the estate of Rybník, with all its appurtenances, the estate of Rakšice, with all its appurtenances, and your other possessions, with fields, vineyards, lands, woods, properties held in usufruct, and pastures, with all other freedoms and their

¹⁴⁴ BF I:771.

¹⁴⁵ BF I:236–37.

¹⁴⁶ BF I:237–38.

¹⁴⁷ BF I:240.

¹⁴⁸ For historical background on this Order see Milan Buben, *Rytířský řád křižovníků s červenou hvězdou* (Prague: L. P., 1996); Krsto Stošič, "Naš starí rukopis o bl. Janji iz Praga," *Bogoslovska Smotra* 19 (1931): 223–29; and Andreas Rüther, "Between International Horizon and Regional Boundary: The Bohemian Crosiers of the Red Star in Silesia," in *Mendicants, Military Orders, and Regionalism in Medieval Europe*, ed. Jürgen Sarnowsky, 103–14 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

immunities regarding forest and field, waters and mills, and streets and paths.¹⁴⁹

While conceding to Agnes's choice to live without property, Gregory IX still wanted to ensure the security of Agnes's monastery within his Ugolinian structure. It is, therefore, not surprising that less than one month after *Pia credulitate tenentes*, the pope attempted a significant mitigation of the fasting regulations for the Monastery of S. Francis. The law of fasting within a monastery associated with the Franciscan women's charism was not a periphery matter. Agnes's sisters were provided for by brothers who begged for their sustenance. Excessive legislation regarding what the sisters could or could not eat, or any caveat that allowed them the possibility of eating more, would make caring for them difficult—a difficulty that could undermine the Franciscan economy of the Prague monastery.

Pope Gregory IX had envisioned at the outset that monasteries of women following his rule would be governed by strict prescriptions for fasting. Dispensations were made not by changing the text of the rule, but by papal dispensations. The Ugolinian text concerning fasting read as follows:

Let them hold this observance for fasting: They are to fast every day at all times, abstaining on the Wednesdays and Fridays outside of Lent from *pulmentum*¹⁵⁰ and wine, unless it happens that the principal feast of some saint needs to be observed at that time. On these days, that is Wednesdays and Fridays, if raw fruits or vegetables are available, they may be given to the sisters for their refreshment. During the week, on four days during Lent, and on three days during the Lent of S. Martin, they are to fast on bread and water; if they wish, they may also do so on the vigils of all solemnities. The very young and the old, however, and those who are bodily sick and infirm are in no way permitted to observe this law of fasting and abstinence; rather, a dispensation for food and fasting is to be made mercifully for them in accordance with their weakness.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ CDB III:195–98.

¹⁵⁰ The term *pulmenta* means “all cooked foods.” See Gerard Pieter Freeman, “Klarissenfasten im 13. Jahrhundert,” *AFH* 87 (1994): 225.

¹⁵¹ The text here is from the 1228 bull, *Cum a Nobis*, sent to the Monastery of S. Mary of the Virgins in Pamplona. The bull is described in Juan de Larrinaga, “Las Clarisas de Pamplona,” *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 5 (1945): 252–54. The text of the bull is transcribed in Ignacio Omaechevarría, ed., *Escritos de Santa Clara y documentos contemporaneos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982), 214–29.

Gerard Pieter Freeman's hierarchy of abstinence foods is helpful for interpreting these fasting regulations.¹⁵² Freeman posits that when one particular rung of the hierarchy was cited by medievals, foods below this rung were allowed, while those above were excluded. In laws of abstinence, animal products were forbidden, but fish were allowed because medievals believed that fish were sexless. It was also noted that Christ ate fish after the resurrection.

Freeman's Fasting Hierarchy

Non-Fasting Foods

- Meat
- Fat
- Milk, milk products, and eggs

Fasting Foods (*cibus quadragesimalis*)

- Fish
- Wine and other *pulmenta* (cooked foods namely legumes, cake, gruel)
- Raw vegetables, fruit and nuts, oil
- Water, bread, and salt
- Eat nothing

If one examines the legislation of the Ugolinian constitutions according to this hierarchy, Ugolino legislated that at all times the fast consisted of water, bread, salt, raw vegetables, fruit, nuts, oil, wine, *pulmenta* (cooked foods, namely legumes, cake, and gruel), and fish. This meant that the sisters were never allowed to consume meat, fat, milk, milk products, and eggs. During Wednesdays and Fridays outside of Lent, they were to omit fish, cooked foods (legumes, cake, and gruel), and wine from the above diet, unless these days fell on a principle feast. Gregory IX specifically points out that raw vegetables were allowed on Wednesdays and Fridays. Each week during the Lent before Easter, the sisters were to fast four days on bread and water, and each week during the Lent of S. Martin they were to fast three days on bread and water. Discreet dispensations were to be made for the very young, old, and the debilitated.

¹⁵² "Klarissenfasten im 13. Jahrhundert," *AFH* 87 (1994): 227.

At the request of the sisters of Agnes's monastery, Gregory IX, in the April 9, 1237, bull, *Cum sicut propositum*, had given the abbess of the Monastery of S. Francis in Prague permission to ease the fasting requirements "due to excessive cold and intemperate weather." According to this document, the abbess could "relax the regulation for continuous fasting."¹⁵³

Not even one month after Agnes received her "privilege of poverty," Gregory IX, in the May 5, 1238 letter, *Pia meditatione pensantes*, offered a further mitigation of the fasting laws for the monastery at Prague. He did this again because of "the coldness of the country."¹⁵⁴ This dispensation had not been solicited by the sisters.

Thus we grant to you by the authority of the present document that on Sundays and Thursdays you may eat twice and be refreshed with dairy products, even though according to that rule you ought to fast on Lenten food all the time. During Easter week and on the solemnities of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and also on those of the apostles, or on the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, and besides these, in times of clear necessity such as illness, none of you is held to the fast.

Moreover, if perchance some one of you should become ill, the abbess has the power of making dispensations for fasting and food, as does the senior sister as well. In addition, we wish that on those days during Lent and Advent on which, according to your rule, you are obliged to fast on bread and water, you have refreshment of all sorts, just as on other fast days.¹⁵⁵

The dispensation is a substantial one. Freeman calculates that the sisters of Prague could by means of this mitigation add milk products and eggs to their diet on ninety-one days during the year. Gregory IX abolished the law, "fast always," by adding dairy products to the list of foods permitted on Thursdays and Sundays. Both the senior sister (Agnes) and the abbess were authorized to give even further dispensations in regard to fasting. On the four weekly fasting days of Lent and on the three weekly fasting days of Advent, the sisters were to follow the Wednesday and Friday rules for fasting in which they could eat bread, water, salt, raw vegetables, fruit, nuts, and oil. During Easter week, the solemnities of the Virgin Mary and the apostles, and on Christmas, the sisters were not obliged to fast.

¹⁵³ BF I:215.

¹⁵⁴ BF I:240–41.

¹⁵⁵ BF I:240–41.

Arriving with the May 5, 1238, fasting mitigation, *Pia meditatione pensantes*, was the May 11, 1238 bull, *Angelis gaudium*, with its accompanying missive, *Cum omnis vera religio*.¹⁵⁶ In *Angelis gaudium*, Gregory refused Agnes's request for a Franciscan rule and spurns her attempt to integrate into the legislation of the Order of S. Damian the form of life given to Clare by Francis. Francis's directive was in Gregory's mind only a "draught of milk," and "was suitable for those who were like newborns."¹⁵⁷

Gregory proceeded to give Agnes three reasons why the approval of her rule was not possible. First, Clare and her sisters had professed the Ugolinian *forma vitae* with an exemption (the "privilege of poverty"). This legislation along with this exemption was, according to Gregory, accepted by Francis. Second, Clare and her sisters put aside the form of life given them by Francis and "have observed that same rule in a praiseworthy fashion from the time of their profession to the present day." Third, since it was uniformly observed, Gregory feared that certain sisters of the Order might "falter due to disturbed considerations regarding its [the legislation's] observance." With his reasons in place, Gregory assured Agnes that she was not obligated by her Franciscan profession, since this profession was not approved by the apostolic see and, according to Gregory, was not the form of life followed by the sisters of S. Damiano in Assisi.

Gregory IX concluded by dispensing Agnes from any obligation that she might feel toward Francis's form of life, and commanded Agnes under obedience to accept the Ugolinian *forma vitae* together with the papal dispensations granted to her monastery. Gregory further assured Agnes that he was most willing to grant her any other dispensations that would be necessary in the future to accommodate the spiritual and physical needs of the Prague monastery.

Devastated that her efforts to secure a Franciscan rule for the monasteries united by Clare's spirit had failed, Agnes wrote to Clare after May 11, 1238. From Clare's response, it is evident that Agnes shared with Clare her triumph in receiving the "privilege of poverty," and also

¹⁵⁶ The text of this bull, the *forma vitae* of Ugolino for the Monastery of S. Francis in Prague, can be found in *Canonizationis Beatae Agnetis de Bohemia*. (Rome: Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum, 1987), 114–22.

¹⁵⁷ BF I:242–44. For a more complete commentary on this episode, see Chapter 3 of this text.

voiced dismay regarding Gregory IX's changes in the fasting practices. Agnes feared that Gregory IX had placed fasting regulations upon the Monastery of S. Francis in Prague that would be inconsistent with the practices followed at S. Damiano. Obviously, despite Gregory IX's belittlement of Francis's form of life, Agnes was still very concerned about being faithful to the early directions that S. Francis had given to the sisters of S. Damiano.

A masterpiece of early Franciscan literature, Clare's third letter responds to the complex crisis that Agnes's hope to have Franciscan legislation for her monastery created. In her letter, Clare commended Agnes for her perseverance and dubs her as "God's own helper."¹⁵⁸ The point of the letter is to send Agnes the hope that she might have "the joys of salvation in him who is the Author of Salvation and for everything better that can be desired"¹⁵⁹ Clare exhorted Agnes to "always rejoice in the Lord"¹⁶⁰ and to let go of bitterness and confusion.¹⁶¹

Agnes was to let go of her worries by placing her "mind in the mirror of eternity," her "soul in the splendor of glory,"¹⁶² her "heart in the figure of the divine substance," and by transforming through contemplation her "entire being into the image of the Divine One himself."¹⁶³ Agnes was to "totally love him who gave himself totally out of love for you."¹⁶⁴ The eschatology here is simultaneously present, future, Eucharistic, and nuptial. As her model in how to integrate all of this, Agnes was to "cling to his most sweet Mother."¹⁶⁵

In Clare's mind, Agnes, who had succeeded in her struggle for the "privilege of poverty," already possessed heaven. Anything that would erode the eschatological joy that the embrace of poverty brings is the work of an evil spirit: "Who would not abhor the treachery of the enemy of humanity who, by means of the pride that results from fleeting and false glories, compels that which is greater than heaven to return to nothingness?"¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁸ 3LAg 8.

¹⁵⁹ 3LAg 2.

¹⁶⁰ 3LAg 10.

¹⁶¹ 3LAg 11.

¹⁶² 3LAg 12.

¹⁶³ 3LAg 13.

¹⁶⁴ 3LAg 15.

¹⁶⁵ 3LAg 18.

¹⁶⁶ 3LAg 20.

Almost as an addendum, Clare gave Agnes the information that she had requested regarding the directives for fasting that Francis had given the S. Damiano sisters:

Indeed, your prudence knows that, with the exception of the weak and the sick, for whom he advised and authorized us to use every possible discretion with respect to any foods whatsoever, none of us who are healthy and strong ought to eat anything other than Lenten fare, on both ordinary days and feast days, fasting every day except on Sundays and on the Lord's Nativity, when we ought to eat twice a day. And, on Thursdays in Ordinary Time, fasting should reflect the personal decision of each sister, so that whoever might not wish to fast would not be obligated to do so. All the same, those of us who are healthy fast every day except Sundays and Christmas. Certainly, during the entire Easter week, as Blessed Francis states in what he has written, and on the feasts of holy Mary and the holy apostles, we are also not obliged to fast, unless these feasts should fall on a Friday; and, as has already been said, we who are healthy and strong always eat Lenten fare.¹⁶⁷

The differences between Clare's directives and those of *Pia meditatione pensantes* are substantial. Clare mandated fasting on all days except Sundays, with optional fasting on Thursdays; Gregory, on the other hand, exempted both Sundays and Thursdays for all the sisters. Gregory permitted dairy products on Sundays and Thursdays, while Clare's directives allowed no dairy products—only Lenten fare. Clare's instructions exempted Christmas from fasting, while fasting was optional during Easter week and on the feasts of Mary and the apostles. Gregory exempted the sisters from fasting both on Christmas and on the days of Clare's "optional" fasting. Clare's directions dispense the ill from fasting but do not clarify who will do this dispensing. In *Pia meditatione pensantes* it is clear that the ill are dispensed from fasting by the abbess or the senior sister. Finally, on the days of fasting during Lent and Advent, Clare permits only bread and water. Gregory IX allows wine and *pulmenta*, which also, according to Freeman's hierarchy, automatically also includes vegetables, fruit, nuts, and oil.

That the fasting regulations followed by the sisters of Prague was not the apostolic see's primary concern in issuing *Pia meditatione pensantes* seems clear from the fact that the papal directives establish norms for fasting practices on the strictest days during Lent and Advent that are not any more stringent than the fasting on all the

¹⁶⁷ 3LAg 31–37.

other days of the year. If fasting practices were Gregory IX's primary concern, this canonical sloppiness would not have gone unnoticed. Surely Agnes recognized this oversight, and with Clare's response in hand, wrote to the pope probably during the fall of 1238. In her letter, she included the information that Clare had given her, reminded the pope of his expressed willingness to grant the Prague monastery appropriate dispensations, and perhaps reiterated the unity argument that Gregory IX himself had used in *Angelus gaudium*. Concerned less with particular fasting practices than with the juridical issue of the rule, Gregory IX willingly capitulated. In his letter of December 18, 1238, *Ex parte Carissimae*, Gregory quotes and concedes to Agnes's *propositum* concerning fasting.

A propositum has come before us from our very dear daughter in Christ, Agnes, . . . that you have been obligated to follow a particular observance for fasting which is as follows: Sisters who are healthy and strong are to fast on Lenten food every day, whether an ordinary or a feast day, with the exception of Sundays and Christmas, although they are in no way held to fast during Easter week, and on the solemnities of the Blessed Virgin and the apostles, unless they occur on a Friday. Also, those who do not wish to do so need not fast on Thursday, except during Lent and Advent. Those who are infirm of body or ill, are by no means to be allowed to observe this law of fasting and abstinence, but according to their illness or weakness, they are to be given dispensations for eating and fasting by the abbess or the senior sister.¹⁶⁸

Although Agnes's attempt to obtain a specifically Franciscan rule that incorporated Francis's own form of life given to Clare and the first sisters failed, Agnes did make progress toward assuring the ability of her monastery to follow the Poor Christ by living without possessions during 1237–1238. Agnes secured, during this time, the "privilege of poverty" for her monastery and, with the encouragement and information given to her in Clare's third letter, was able to have the pope confirm fasting practices that, according to Clare, Francis himself had given the sisters of S. Damiano.

The fasting practices outlined in Clare's third letter, in *Pia meditatione pensantes* of May 5, 1238, and in *Ex parte Carissimae* of December 18, 1238, can be charted as follows. One can clearly see the influence of Clare's letter in the December 18, 1238, papal response to Agnes.

¹⁶⁸ BF I:258–29.

Fasting
Clare’s Third Letter and the Papal Letters of 1238

Clare’s <i>Third Letter</i> July–October, 1238	<i>Pia meditatione</i> <i>pensantes</i> May 5, 1238	<i>Ex parte Carissimae</i> December 18, 1238
Indeed, your prudence knows that, with the exception of the weak and the sick, for whom he [Francis] advised and authorized us to use every possible discretion with respect to any foods whatsoever	in times of clear necessity such as illness, none of you is held to the fast. Moreover, if perchance some one of you should become ill, the abbess has the power of making dispensations for fasting and food, as does the senior sister as well.	Those who are infirm of body or ill, will by no means be allowed to observe this law of fasting and abstinence, but according to their illness or weakness, they are to be given dispensations for eating and fasting by the abbess or the senior sister. (Note that “abbess” and “senior sister” are taken from <i>Pia meditatione pensantes</i>).
none of us who are healthy and strong ought to eat anything other than Lenten fare, on both ordinary days and feast days, fasting every day except on Sundays and on the Lord’s Nativity, when we ought to eat twice a day.	Thus we grant to you by the authority of the present document that on Sundays and Thursdays you may eat twice and be refreshed with dairy products, even though according to that rule you ought to fast on Lenten food all the time. (Clare’s instructions directly contradict this direction). In addition, we wish that on those days during Lent and Advent on which, according to your rule, you are obliged to fast on bread and water, you have refreshment of all sorts, just as on other fast days. (Clare does not permit this).	Sisters who are healthy and strong are to fast on Lenten food every day, whether an ordinary or a feast day, with the exception of Sundays and Christmas (Note that the revised papal text is derived from Clare’s instructions).

Table (cont.)

Fasting Clare's Third Letter and the Papal Letters of 1238		
Clare's <i>Third Letter</i> July–October, 1238	<i>Pia meditatione</i> <i>pensantes</i> May 5, 1238	<i>Ex parte Carissimae</i> December 18, 1238
And, on Thursdays in Ordinary Time, fasting should reflect the personal decision of each sister, so that, whoever might not wish to fast would not be obliged to do so.		Also, those who do not wish to do so do not fast on Thursday, except in Lent and Advent. (The construction of <i>Ex parte Carissimae</i> follows Clare's third letter, not <i>Pia meditatione pensantes</i>).
All the same, those of us who are healthy fast every day except Sundays and Christmas.		(Clare's personal reference is edited out of this letter).
Certainly, during the entire Easter week, as Blessed Francis states in what he has written, and on the feasts of holy Mary and of the holy apostles, we are also not obliged to fast, unless these feasts should fall on a Friday; and, as has already been said, we who are healthy and strong always eat Lenten fare.	During Easter week and on the solemnities of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and also on those of the apostles, or on the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, . . . none of you is held to the fast. (The prescription for Christmas is placed differently. Ordinary Friday fasts have precedence over feast days).	although they are in no way held to fast during Easter week and on the solemnities of the Blessed Virgin and the apostles, unless they occur on a Friday. (Note that both of Clare's references to S. Francis have been edited out of the papal letter).

THE FOURTH LETTER

After the victory of her "privilege of poverty" (April 15, 1238, *Pia credulitate tenentes*), and the reinstatement of fasting practices consistent with Francis's instructions (December 18, 1238, *Ex parte Carissimae*), Agnes seems to have remained relatively quiet during the rest of Gregory IX's term of office. There was one aspect, however, intimately connected to her "privilege of poverty" that Agnes continued to pursue.

The September 28, 1230 bull, *Quo elongati*,¹⁶⁹ had prohibited the Franciscan brothers from entering the cloister, living quarters, and the inner shops of monasteries of nuns. In order to obtain access to these monasteries, the brothers needed expressed papal permission. The response of Clare to *Quo elongati* is described in the *Legend of Clare*:

The pious mother, sorrowing that her sisters would more rarely have the food of sacred teaching, sighed: 'Let him now take away from us all the brothers since he has taken away those who provide us with the food that is vital.' At once she sent back to the minister all the brothers, not wanting to have the questors who acquired corporal bread when they could not have the questors for spiritual bread. When Pope Gregory heard this, he immediately mitigated that prohibition into the hands of the minister general.¹⁷⁰

At stake was the access of Clare and her sisters to Franciscan preaching. The *Legend of Clare* records the above protest in the context of recalling Clare's appreciation of preaching. Clare's reaction was quieted when Gregory IX placed the power to grant access to Clare's monastery into the hands of the Franciscan minister general.

The *forma vitae* of Ugolino allowed bishops, cardinals, and, of course, the visitor to enter the monastery under prescribed conditions. Workmen could enter when necessary, while the chaplain could go in to hear the confession, give communion to a dying sister, and, under certain conditions, to perform the funeral rites. Permission was not given, however, in Ugolino's *forma vitae* for the Franciscan brothers to enter monasteries of women to beg or preach.

Access to Ugolinian monasteries may have played a role in the disposition of Brother Elias. According to the *Chronicle of Brother Thomas of Eccleston*, the punishment for entering a monastery of Poor Ladies could be severe, and such a transgression was not to be forgiven even in the case of a former minister general:

After this, Brother Elias, having chosen the place of Cortona for his dwelling place, went without permission and against the general prohibition of the minister general to visit the houses of the Poor Ladies. For this reason he seems to have incurred the sentence of excommunication decreed by the pope. But Brother Albert commanded him to come to him to obtain absolution or at least to meet him at some intermedi-

¹⁶⁹ BF I:68–70. An English translation of this bull can be found in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, ed. Regis Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 570–75.

¹⁷⁰ *LegCl* 37.

ate place. When he declined to do this, the pope heard about it; and, when he saw that the pope wanted him to obey the minister general like any other brother, not being able to bear the humiliation in as much as he had not learned to obey, he betook himself to the neighborhood of Arezzo. Wherefore, not undeservedly, he was publicly excommunicated by the pope.¹⁷¹

Agnes needed a dispensation for the Franciscan brothers associated with her monastery to enter for needed work within the monastery, and also to provide care for her sisters. Given the determination of Gregory IX to focus on enclosure as essential to women's religious life, the political climate surrounding the disposition of Elias, and the fact that unauthorized visitation of the poor cloistered sisters was one of Elias's alleged misdeeds, receiving a bull mitigating the enclosure in order to permit the begging and preaching of the brothers would be difficult.

Agnes received her opportunity in late summer of 1240. According to two letters written by Albert Böhme, a papal legate, Pope Gregory IX needed Agnes to persuade her brother, King Wenceslas I, to ally himself with the pope against Frederick II, who threatened to place all of Italy, including Rome, under his domain.¹⁷² If Gregory's letter arrived in Bohemia in October/November, and Agnes's response reached Gregory between December–April, a May 31, 1241, letter concerning the Friars Minor who were assigned to the needs of the monastery would be timely. Gregory's letter, *Vestris piis supplicationibus*,¹⁷³ contains only the requested permission and seems almost terse. Is this because he was irritated by Agnes's request, and/or because his political vulnerability reduced time for flourishes? The letter adds little to the prescriptions of the rule other than expressly giving the Franciscan brothers the same rights as other workmen and the chaplain to enter Agnes's monastery. In any case, there is no other known extant correspondence between Agnes and Gregory IX after *Vestris piis supplicationibus*. With the emperor's armies surrounding Rome, Gregory IX died on August 22, 1241.

¹⁷¹ Tomae de Eccleston, *Liber de Adventu Fratrum Minorum in Angliam* in AF 1 (1885): 243. For the English translation used here see *The Chronicle of Brother Thomas of Eccleston*, in *XIIIth Century Chronicles*, trans. Placid Herman (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1961), 156.

¹⁷² CDB III: 332; 334; 337–38. Concerning the relationship between Gregory IX and Frederick II, see Mario Bernabò Silorata, *Gregorio IX e Federico II di Svevia: Incontri e scontri tra sacerdozio e impero* (Florence: Edizioni Nerbini, 2007).

¹⁷³ BF I:295.

After a nearly two-year interregnum, Innocent IV ascended to the papacy on June 28, 1243. As was the custom, Agnes immediately wrote to congratulate him and to place herself under him as a spiritual daughter. Innocent's response accepting her as a spiritual daughter, *Ex regali progenie*, is dated summer, 1243.¹⁷⁴ Upon receiving this letter, Agnes immediately wrote back to the new pontiff asking "that the two phrases which are written regarding 'the virtue of obedience' and 'the Rule of Benedict' be removed from that form and that we have those indulgences that were specially granted to the aforesaid monastery by Pope Gregory recorded in it."¹⁷⁵ Agnes wanted her "privilege of poverty" confirmed within the very legislation of her monastery, not tenuously held as an exemption.

Innocent IV not only denied Agnes's request in his November 13, 1243, letter, *In Divini timore nominis*,¹⁷⁶ but, in another November 13, 1243, missive, *Piis votis omnium*,¹⁷⁷ mitigated the fasting laws for the monastery of Prague even further than the infamous *Pia meditatione pensantes*. Repeating the same reasons for his denial of Agnes's request for a Franciscan rule that Gregory IX had formulated in *Angelis gaudium*, he in essence warned Agnes not to bother him again about these things. Innocent IV had not known Francis as Gregory IX had, and did not possess his predecessor's care and compassion for the Poor Ladies.

By the summer of 1244, Innocent IV had fled to Lyons and was enjoying the protection of King Louis IX. Not at all happy with the papal response, and knowing that the papacy needed the political support of the king of Bohemia, Agnes wrote again. Unmoved, Innocent IV reiterated his position in the August 21, 1244 letter, *Cum universitati vestrae*.¹⁷⁸ Innocent, however, had to revisit his entrenchment in light of the dangerous political climate that Clare specifically refers to as the reason for not writing to Agnes sooner in her fourth letter: "The truth is that a shortage of messengers and the obvious perils of travel have hindered me."¹⁷⁹ On September 20, 1245, in the bull, *Cum id quod*,

¹⁷⁴ This letter can be found in *Canonizationis Beatae Agnetis de Bohemia* (Rome: Sacra Congregatio Pro Causis Sanctorum, 1987), 161–62.

¹⁷⁵ *BF* I:315–17.

¹⁷⁶ *BF* I:315–17.

¹⁷⁷ *BF* I:314–15.

¹⁷⁸ *BF* I:350.

¹⁷⁹ *4LAG* 6.

Innocent IV again asked Agnes to influence the king of Bohemia on behalf of the papal agenda.¹⁸⁰

Pressured by the political situation, and needing Agnes's support, Innocent capitulated to Agnes, expanding the privileges of the brothers living next to Agnes's monastery. On October 21, 1245, in *Vestris piis supplicationibus*, Innocent IV gave the Franciscan brothers broad permission to enter certain monasteries. The brothers could:

come to the aforementioned monasteries on their special feast days and at the death of your sisters to celebrate the Divine Office on their behalf and to preach the Word of God to the people who come there at this and other times. They may also come for other reasonable and honorable matters, and may themselves approach or send brothers of their Order, when they see fit, to the doors, grills, and parlors of those monasteries.¹⁸¹

On November 13, 1245, in *Solet annuere*, Innocent IV reissued Ugolino's *forma vitae* for the Damianite monasteries.¹⁸² In his November 14, 1245 missive to the friars, *Ordinem vestrum*, Innocent IV amended *Quo elongati* giving permission for brothers who had a faculty from the Holy See to enter the monasteries of the nuns of the Order of S. Damiano.¹⁸³ Agnes had successfully negotiated her "privilege of poverty," fasting norms consistent with those observed at S. Damiano, and allowances for the brothers to preach to the sisters within the enclosure of the monastery. Even with all this, there was still one obstacle remaining—the mention of the Rule of S. Benedict in the Ugolinian *forma vitae*. Agnes wanted her Franciscan identity confirmed in law.

The cry to be identified as Franciscan was common to a number of monasteries of Damianites. On August 5, 1247, Innocent IV circulated his own version of the Ugolinian *forma vitae* to all the abbesses and nuns of the Order of S. Damian.¹⁸⁴ In his legislation, Innocent deleted the mention of the Rule of S. Benedict and affirmed for the sisters their profession of the Rule of S. Francis. *Quo elongate*, *Ordinem vestrum*, and the August 19, 1247 bull, *Quanto studiosius divinae*¹⁸⁵ significantly mitigated the friar's commitment to poverty. In addition, Innocent's new legislation proposed fasting customs gravely contrary to Clare's third

¹⁸⁰ CDB II:162–63.

¹⁸¹ BF I:388.

¹⁸² BF I:394–99.

¹⁸³ BF I:400–402.

¹⁸⁴ BF I:476–83.

¹⁸⁵ BF I:487–88.

letter and permitted the holding of revenue and common possessions. While Innocent IV mouthed an affirmation of the Rule of S. Francis in his new legislation, he contradicted the “privilege of poverty.”

The accompanying papal letter, *Quoties a Nobis* of August 23, 1247, clearly stated the papal intention to insist upon a unified profession for the Ugolinian monasteries and a nullification of all former dispensations.¹⁸⁶ The outcry of the Damianite sisters who had relied upon these dispensations must have been great. Already by June 6, 1250, in his letter *Inter personas alias*, Innocent IV completely gave up the possibility of a unified profession.¹⁸⁷ He ordered the cardinal of Ostia to permit the sisters to live under either the *forma vitae* of Ugolino or his new legislation.

The former Ugolinian confederation could now be legally viewed as two distinct groups of federated monasteries—those that held common possessions and accepted the Ugolinian version of the Rule of S. Benedict, and those women associated with S. Damiano who lived without property and privileges and desired to live under specifically Franciscan legislation. Given that the uniformity of the Ugolinian federation was now officially broken, Agnes’s political clout as a royal was no longer needed. It was Clare who worked directly with Cardinal Rainaldo in the composition of a *forma vitae* appropriate for the S. Damiano monastery and its associates.

The tone of Clare’s fourth letter is unmistakably eschatological. There is no reference to the papal approval of Clare’s *forma vitae*, which most likely indicates that Clare’s final letter to Agnes was composed before August 9, 1253. Clare began her letter with the utmost affection addressing Agnes as “the other half of her soul and the repository of the special love of her deepest heart.”¹⁸⁸ No doubt, Agnes’s struggle to obtain the “privilege of poverty” for the Prague monastery, and her ability to negotiate with the papacy to obtain legislation consistent with this privilege endeared Agnes to Clare. The purpose of Clare’s letter, however, is not political. Clare’s final hope for Agnes is that she will meet her and her Prague sisters before the throne of God.¹⁸⁹

After transitioning to the body of her letter via the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome*, Clare bequeathed to Agnes the secret of her life of

¹⁸⁶ BF I:488.

¹⁸⁷ BF Supp., 22–24.

¹⁸⁸ 4LAg 1.

¹⁸⁹ 4LAg 3.

prayer—the mirror who is Christ. Gazing into this mirror daily, Clare counseled Agnes to focus on the birth, public life, death, and glory of Jesus Christ. Clare is playing on various meanings of the Latin word *speculum*, beginning with a reference to Christ as a physical “mirror” by which a Poor Sister was able to look upon her face and dress herself: “so that in this way you may adorn yourself completely, inwardly and outwardly, clothed and covered in multicolored apparel, adorned in the same manner with flowers and garments made of all the virtues as is proper, dearest daughter and spouse of the Most High King.”¹⁹⁰ Clare then cleverly shifts from her concrete image of Christ as “mirror,” to the more figurative image of Christ as the “model,” also a definition of *speculum*,¹⁹¹ of “blessed poverty, holy humility, and charity beyond words.”¹⁹² Unfortunately the English language does not have a word like *speculum* that is able to contain both of Clare’s meanings simultaneously. Even so, transitioning from the concept of a physical mirror, to a mirror as the model of poverty, humility, and charity is necessary, if one wishes to understand Clare’s instructions.

Verses 19–23 have been consistently mistranslated because of this pivoting use of the word *speculum*. The passage is constructed through use of the words *principium*, *medio*, and *fine* (beginning, middle, and end). The first line reads literally: “Look closely, I say, to the beginning of this mirror, indeed at the poverty of him who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger.”¹⁹³ Clare proceeds to *in medio*: “Consider also the middle of the mirror, his humility, or at least his blessed poverty, the countless hardships, and the punishments that he endured for the redemption of the human race.”¹⁹⁴ Also, according to Clare, “contemplate in the end (*in fine*) of this same mirror the ineffable love with which he was willing to suffer on the tree of the cross and to die there a kind of death that is more shameful than any other.”¹⁹⁵ It is obvious that Clare is no longer speaking here of a physical mirror, but of the birth, public life, and death of Christ. This works grammatically, since the words *principium*, *medio*, and *fine* each

¹⁹⁰ 4LAg 15–17.

¹⁹¹ See Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-Life*, s.v. “speculum;” and Giles Constable, “The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ,” in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 226.

¹⁹² 4LAg 18.

¹⁹³ 4LAg 19.

¹⁹⁴ 4LAg 22.

¹⁹⁵ 4LAg 23.

contain a temporal as well as a spatial sense, and can be translated as the beginning, middle, or the end of life.

If we understand Clare's pivotal use of *speculum*, the problematic lines translate as "Look closely, I say, to the beginning of the life of this admired one,"¹⁹⁶ "Consider also the midst of his life,"¹⁹⁷ and "Ponder, moreover, the final days of this mirrored one."¹⁹⁸ Obviously the mirror Clare is referring to is not a physical mirror,¹⁹⁹ but Christ himself. This is confirmed by Clare who continues by imagining the "mirror" on the cross: "That mirror suspended upon the wood of the cross from there kept urging those passing by of what must be considered, saying: O all you who pass by this way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering."²⁰⁰

Throughout these verses, Clare is teaching Agnes to spend her time in prayer meditating on the birth, public life, and death of Christ, but again Clare's construction surprises. Outside the temporality of *principium*, *medio*, and *fine* is one more instruction. Agnes is to place herself not only within the mysteries of Christ's birth, life, and death, but also *insuper/furthermore* within the escatological vision.²⁰¹ Clare's prayer, therefore, contains four reflections: 1) Christ's birth; 2) his public life; 3) his death; 4) his eternal life in glory.

Furthermore, as you contemplate his indescribable delights, riches, and everlasting honors, and heaving a sigh because of your heart's immeasurable desire and love you might exclaim:

Draw me after you, heavenly Spouse, we
shall run in the fragrance of your perfumes!

I shall run and not grow weary until you
bring me into the wine cellar,
until your left hand is under my head
and your right arm blissfully embraces me;
and you kiss me with the most blissful kiss of your mouth.

Amid her eschatological overtones, Clare's precious "privilege of poverty" breaks through. Agnes is to run and not grow weary "until your left

¹⁹⁶ 4LAg 19.

¹⁹⁷ 4LAg 22.

¹⁹⁸ 4LAg 23.

¹⁹⁹ 4LAg 15.

²⁰⁰ 4LAg 24–25.

²⁰¹ 4LAg 28–32.

hand is under my head and your right arm blissfully embraces me.”²⁰² The allusion to the Song of Songs is also found in the “privilege of poverty” given to Clare by Gregory IX in 1228. In the “privilege of poverty,” the left hand symbolizes the temporal care—the hundred-fold—given by God: “Nor does a lack of possessions frighten you from a proposal of this sort; for the left hand of the heavenly Spouse is under your head to support the weakness of your body, which you have placed under the law of your soul through an ordered charity.” Alternatively, the “right arm” symbolizes the eschatological reward given to those who persevere in poverty: “He who feeds the birds of the heavens and clothes the lilies of the field will not fail you in either food or clothing, until He ministers to you in heaven, when his right arm especially will more happily embrace you in the fullness of his sight.”²⁰³ In the embrace of the “privilege of poverty,” both the temporal and the eschatological are supported by God.²⁰⁴

The Song of Songs was an essential element of the popular thirteenth-century religious milieu, and Clare's sisters were certainly familiar with this popular religious culture. Liturgically, the first and third lessons for Matins of the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, September 8, are taken from the Song of Songs and can account for the verses highlighted by Clare. It is Clare's insertion of the word *feliciter/happily*, however, that points to the “privilege of poverty” as the immediate source of Clare's reflections, since only the “privilege of poverty” inserts *feliciter* into the scriptural reference. At the end of her life, Clare concluded her correspondence with Agnes who she regarded “as dearer than all others,”²⁰⁵ by alluding to the precious “privilege of poverty” that they shared.

While Clare hoped to meet Agnes “at the throne of the glory of the great God,”²⁰⁶ she would follow the example of God who cared for both the eschatological and the temporal. Her closing lines asked Agnes to receive charitably the brothers, no doubt nicknamed or, less likely, with serendipitous names, who were delivering her letter, “Brother Amato, beloved by God and human beings, and Brother

²⁰² 4LAg 32.

²⁰³ BF I:771.

²⁰⁴ The symbol of the left arm as the symbol of the present life, and of the right arm as symbolizing eternal life is also found in Gregory the Great, *Expositiones in Cantica Canticorum*, in PL 79, col. 496.

²⁰⁵ 4LAg 34.

²⁰⁶ 4LAg 39.

Bonaugura.”²⁰⁷ Eschatological bliss, for Clare, was always expressed in the very practical love and tender care of neighbor—in this case, her beloved Franciscan brothers.

As in her *forma vitae*, Clare closed her fourth letter with a liturgical, “Amen.” It was her last letter to Agnes, the end of a happy temporal life, and the beginning of her eschatological glory. The rhythm of Clare’s liturgical life at the Monastery of S. Damiano, transitioned with her “Amen” into the glory of the heavenly liturgy. Caring always for the souls of her sisters, Clare invited Agnes and her other sisters to meet her there, “at the throne of the glory of the great God.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ 4LAg 40.

²⁰⁸ 4LAg 39.

CHAPTER SIX

THE AGNES LEGEND IN CLARE'S LETTERS

The Legend of Agnes of Rome dramatizes the story of a tenacious Christian girl whose fidelity to Christ as her bridegroom eventually gained for her the crown of martyrdom.¹ Enjoying extraordinary popularity during the Middle Ages, the prominence of the *Legend of Agnes of Rome* surpassed other hagiographic legends of women whose historicity is more solidly substantiated.² Even in cursory ambles through thirteenth-century art collections, one commonly discovers portrayals of the Christian girl who preferred martyrdom rather than infidelity to her divine bridegroom.

Agnes of Rome enjoyed early prominence in the Roman liturgy, and her name found its way into the Roman Martyrology and eventually into the Tridentine Canon. Her *Legend* became part of the early Roman Office of Matins and retained its prominence and length despite Innocent III's efforts at abbreviation. The medieval liturgy of the solemn consecration of virgins, while oddly neglecting references to the Virgin Mary, placed primacy on the legends of S. Agnes and S. Agatha, borrowing from no other hagiographic source.³

There is evidence that the popular *Legend of Agnes of Rome* was already translated into vernacular languages in the twelfth century. Herbert Grundmann cites one example:

At approximately the time Waldes was having the bible translated in Lyon, the priest Lambert (d. 1177) was translating the Acts of the Apostles and the *Legend of S. Agnes* in Liège, not for himself or as the basis for an apostolic mission, but for the edification of others. Lambert had been seeking to combat the worldly doings of urban culture through sermons and example. Particularly, he had organized communities of pious laity who sought to return a Christian character to the Sunday celebration,

¹ This essay is reprinted from Joan Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001).

² Alban Butler and Michael Walsh, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, January (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 138.

³ See Teresa Tavormina, "Of Maidenhood and Maternity: Liturgical Hagiography and the Medieval Ideal of Virginity," *American Benedictine Review* 31 (December 1980): 387.

instead of desecrating it with minstrels, entertainers, and comedians, through drinking, games, indecent songs, dancing, and shameless carousing. He prepared his translations and pious essays in the vernacular: for women there was a version of *The Legend of S. Agnes*, and for all of them together there was an edition of the Acts of the Apostles, both of them interspersed with his own moral observations and in verse.⁴

Given this popularity, it is not surprising to find references to the *Agnes Legend* in the writings of medieval women. The letters of Clare of Assisi to Agnes of Prague serve as an example.⁵ In her four letters to Agnes of Prague, Clare directly quotes, paraphrases, and makes allusions to the *Agnes Legend*.

Although it is neither original nor difficult to identify citings of and allusions to the *Legend of Agnes of Rome* within Clare's letters to Agnes of Prague, Clare's source for this *Legend* has not yet been systematically questioned. Given the poverty of the S. Damiano monastery and the cost of a medieval manuscript, it is clear that Clare did not have a library of codices at her disposal. Because of this paucity, perhaps the proverbial scholarly exclamation, "If I only knew what was on her bookshelf," could be hypothesized in Clare's case.

CLARE'S SOURCE OF THE AGNES LEGEND

In pondering Clare's source of the *Agnes Legend*, three possibilities come to mind. First, Clare's knowledge of the *Legend of Agnes of Rome* sprang from popular sources such as sermons, poems, songs, or plays which depicted the *Agnes Legend*; second, Clare's source was the Roman consecration of virgins liturgy which incorporated elements of the *Agnes Legend*; third, Clare used as her primary source the text of the Divine Office recited at S. Damiano.

The Legend of Clare states that Clare loved to listen to sermons.⁶ It is possible that sermons or other venues of popular culture were Clare's primary source of the *Agnes Legend*. Clare's poetic license in referring

⁴ *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 192–93.

⁵ See also Ann Matter, "Il Cantico dei Cantici negli 'Exercitia Spiritualia' di Gertrude la Grande di Helfta," in *Chiara: Francescanesimo al femminile*, ed. Davide Covi and Dino Dozzi, 46–54 (Rome: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1992).

⁶ *LegCl* 37.

to the *Legend* might suggest a poetic or dramatic source, but such a source is not preserved. Throughout her letters, Clare uses scriptural sources fluidly, rarely quoting texts literally, often changing verb tenses, combining passages to illustrate her theological purpose more clearly, or weaving scriptural allusions with prose. Given Clare's freedom with scriptural texts, one sees that Clare is quite capable of using poetic license, making a theory that Clare's freedom signals a solely popular source for the Agnes *Legend* unsubstantiated.

Given Clare's sensitivity to Agnes of Prague, and her reverence and respect toward Agnes as a royal woman, an educated woman, and a spouse of Christ, it is unlikely that Clare would have chosen a local vernacular source unfamiliar to Agnes. However, since Agnes of Rome was Agnes of Prague's patron saint, one can certainly speculate that Clare may have rightly assumed that Agnes of Prague knew well the *Legend of Agnes of Rome*.

Without doubting popular knowledge of a vernacular source of the Agnes *Legend*, could one also imagine a liturgical source for the *Legend* existing at the Monastery of S. Damiano? Following the study by Teresa Tavormina, Regis Armstrong recalls the influence of the *Legend of Agnes* on the Roman liturgy of the consecration of virgins.⁷ Edith Van den Goorbergh and Theodore Zweerman in *Light Shining through a Veil* connect 1LAG 8–11 to the consecration liturgy itself.⁸ If Clare's first letter was written to celebrate the occasion of Agnes's entrance into the monastery, this reasoning is enticing.

In examining thirteenth-century sacramentaries, however, one discovers textual problems with the theory that Clare depended upon the liturgy of the consecration of virgins as her source for the Agnes *Legend*. Michel Andrieu's manuscript synthesis of the thirteenth-century pontifical liturgy shows little variation in the *Ordo ad virginem benedicendam* in thirteenth-century manuscripts. In the pontificals, Andrieu records the following three quotations taken from the Agnes *Legend*.

- 1) *Induit me dominus ciclade auro texta et immensis monilibus ornavit me.*

(The Lord clothed me in a robe of state woven with gold, and adorned me with innumerable necklaces).

⁷ See "Starting Points: Images of Women in the Letters of Clare," *CF* 62 (1992): 63–100.

⁸ (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 44.

- 2) *Posuit signum in faciem meam, ut nullum preter eum amatorem admittam.*

(He placed a seal on my face, so that I will admit no lover except him).

- 3) *Cui angeli serviunt, cuius pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur.*
(Angels serve him, whose beauty the sun and moon admire).⁹

Of these three quotations, Clare quotes part of the third in 3*LAG* 16: “cuius pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur.” She alludes to this same source in 4*LAG* 10: “cuius pulchritudinem omnia beata caelorum agmina incessabiliter admirantur.”

Using English consecration ceremonies as her source, Tavormina highlights sections of the Agnes *Legend* transposed into the liturgy.¹⁰ Although she does not include her Latin texts, Tavormina cites only one other line from the Agnes *Legend* from her English liturgical sources that is employed by Clare in 1*LAG* 8: “Having loved him, I am chaste; having touched him, I am clean; having received him, I am a virgin.”

This analysis of the liturgy of the consecration of virgins makes it difficult to account for many of Clare’s paraphrases and allusions to the Agnes *Legend*. Given this data, it is necessary to exclude the consecration of virgins liturgy as Clare’s primary source of this *Legend*.

⁹ Michel Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au moyen-âge*, tome II, *Le pontifical de la curie romaine au XIII^e siècle*, (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1940), 414–18. In reading through various manuscript renditions of the rite of consecration of virgins, one finds more and more lines from the *Legend of Agnes of Rome* inserted into later versions of the consecration liturgy. However, none of these later rites does this so extensively as to be able to explain fully Clare’s use of the *Legend*. For these various texts see, Edmond Martène, *De antiquius ecclesiae ritibus libri*, tome II (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), cols., 517–59. For the history of the rite of the consecration of virgins see O. G. Harrison, “The Formulas *Ad virgines sacras*: A Study of the Sources,” *Ephemerides liturgicae* 66 (1952): 252–73; and René Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l’église romaine: Étude d’histoire de la liturgie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954).

¹⁰ Tavormina, “Of Maidenhood and Maternity,” note 1, pages 384–85, lists her sources as follows: *Liber Pontificalis Christopheri Bainbridge*, *Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, ed. Willam G. Henderson, Surtees Society 61 (Durham 1875), 154–69; *Liber Pontificalis of Edmund Lacy*, *Bishop of Exeter*, ed. Ralph Barnes (Exeter 1847), 114–22; and *Missale ad Usus Ecclesiae Westmonasteriensis*, ed. J. Wickham Legg, Henry Bradshaw Society 1, 5, 12 (London 1891–1897), 2. cols., 1197–1212.

THE DIVINE OFFICE AS A POSSIBLE SOURCE

With the approved Rule of 1223, the Franciscan Order not only became more disciplined in its recital of the Roman Office, but also set up a scriptorium in Assisi to produce master copies of the Regula breviary, based on the Office of the Roman court, to be sent all over Europe.¹¹ Given papal impetus and Franciscan missionary activity, the papal breviary spread rapidly in the years following 1223.¹²

In his synthesis of the Office of Agnes of Rome,¹³ Van Dijk cites "Lectiones leguntur de passione eius [Servus Christi Ambrosius],"¹⁴ and includes cues for the antiphons and responsories in three nocturns signaling nine lessons. There is also listed an octave for the feast with three additional lessons. The goal of Innocent III's reform was to curb unwieldy lessons in order to reduce the time needed to say the Office and to make possible a portable breviary.¹⁵ An Office of twelve lessons was exceptional. The Regula Office for the Feast of Agnes of Rome with its twelve lengthy lessons intact was such an exception.

It does not seem unfair to hypothesize that the early friars, and certainly in the case of Clare, Francis himself, might have seen to it that the monasteries of the Poor Ladies of S. Damiano and of Prague each had a copy of the Regula breviary. In 1253, Clare states in her *forma vitae* that her sisters could have these breviaries: "The sisters, who can read, say the Divine Office according to the custom of the Friars Minor. They are able to have breviaries for this, reading them without singing."¹⁶ However, we also know that Francis's companions, Leo, Angelo, and Rufino used *The Breviary of S. Francis*, a pre-Regula breviary with several Haymonian corrections added by Leo, well after 1230. In 1257–58, these brothers gave this breviary as a gift to the sisters. Clare's sisters continued to use the book after 1257.¹⁷

¹¹ Stephen Van Dijk and Joan Hazelden Walker, *The Ordinal of the Papal Court from Innocent III to Boniface VIII and Related Documents* (Switzerland: The University Press Fribourg, 1975), XVII and XXIV–XXV.

¹² Manuscripts of the Regula breviary are listed in Stephen Van Dijk, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy: The Liturgy of the Papal Court and the Franciscan Order in the Thirteenth Century* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1960), 218–19.

¹³ Van Dijk and Walker, *The Ordinal of the Papal Court*, 363–65.

¹⁴ Van Dijk and Walker, *The Ordinal of the Papal Court*, 364.

¹⁵ Van Dijk, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy*, 127.

¹⁶ *FLCL* 3:1–2.

¹⁷ Stephen Van Dijk, "The Breviary of S. Francis," *FS* 9 (1949): 17–19.

At the general chapter of 1230, copies of the breviary produced at the Assisi scriptorium were distributed to the provinces of the Order.¹⁸ While it is possible that both Clare and Agnes may have had copies of this *Regula* breviary at the time that Clare wrote her letters, it would be just as probable, particularly in the case of the sisters of S. Damiano, that Clare and her sisters continued to use an earlier manuscript—perhaps donated to them by Bishop Guido or by the canons of S. Rufino early in the history of their community. This earlier edition may simply have been corrected in line with liturgical reforms.

Even if the new breviaries were not available to both Clare and Agnes, the Assisi and Prague monasteries would have needed some manuscript to fulfill their religious obligation of reciting the Divine Office. Since the Office of S. Agnes of Rome was an ancient text, it would have been found both in the *Regula* breviary and in older medieval breviaries.

Further testing of the hypothesis that Clare used the text of the January 21st Office of Matins as a source of the Agnes *Legend* in her letters to Agnes of Prague is required. One needs to search the antiphons, responsories, and the lessons of the Agnes Office to find possible sources for Clare's direct quotes and paraphrases, as well as for the allusions that Clare may have borrowed from the Office.

MATINS—THE FEAST OF S. AGNES OF ROME

A sort of “holy week” for women, the ancient Office of S. Agnes of Rome began on January 21, the date commemorating Agnes's trial and the beginning of her passion, and closed on January 28, the celebrated date of her death.¹⁹ The author, who names himself as “Ambrose,” openly suggests that the example of Agnes described in the *Legend* should be imitated by other virgins: “to the honor of so great a martyr, I have written down her deeds as I have come to know them. I thought that the account of her passion had been destined for your imitation, oh virgins of Christ, and I pray to the Holy Spirit that our labors find fruit before the Lord in the similarity of your lives.”

¹⁸ *ChrJG* 57 says: “At the same general chapter (1230) breviaries and antiphonaries according to the usage of the Order were sent to the provinces.”

¹⁹ Butler and Walsh, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, January, 139.

To attempt to identify the text of the Office of S. Agnes that may have been prayed by Clare and her sisters in 1234, seven thirteenth-century manuscripts were consulted. The first, *The Breviary of S. Francis*, is perhaps the most ancient extant rubricated portable breviary. On the first folio there is a note written by Brother Leo attesting that the book belonged to Francis, Leo, and Angelo. Along with Brother Rufino, Brothers Leo and Angelo gave the precious relic to Sister Benedicta, Clare's successor as abbess, for safekeeping about 1257–58, when the sisters moved their monastery within the walls of Assisi.²⁰

The rendering of the January 21st Office of S. Agnes in *The Breviary of S. Francis* is interesting and typical to the style of this particular manuscript.²¹ The feast and its octave contain nine lessons each, but these lessons are considerably shortened from those found in all but one of the other manuscripts studied. In this breviary, the eighteen lessons for the Feast of S. Agnes and its octave do not cover the same amount of text that others cover in nine lessons for the feast and three lessons for the octave. Although interesting for the study of the life of S. Francis, this breviary was not the one used by Clare and her sisters during the years that Clare was writing to Agnes of Prague.

Leo made several corrections to the text of Francis's breviary in 1244, shortly after the publication of Haymo's *ordo*.²² This observation is helpful to note, since it points to the fact that Franciscans used breviaries other than those produced in the Assisi scriptorium after the promulgation of the Rule of 1223. Francis, in his eagerness to follow the mandate of the 1223 rule, probably obtained this breviary from a chaplain of the papal court before the Assisi scriptorium could be established and a *Regula* breviary produced.²³

The reader may wonder why the so-called *Breviary of S. Clare*, housed at the Monastery of S. Damiano, was not considered as the only manuscript upon which to base this study. Van Dijk's analysis of this breviary, which is in reality both a breviary and a missal, proposes that it was written between 1231–41, at the direction of the bishop of

²⁰ Background information on *The Breviary of S. Francis* can be found in Van Dijk, "The Breviary of St. Francis," 13–25; and Van Dijk and Walker, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy*, 129–35.

²¹ Van Dijk, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy*, 131.

²² Van Dijk, "The Breviary of St. Francis," 17.

²³ Van Dijk, "The Breviary of St. Francis," 17.

Assisi who wished to reform the liturgy of S. Rufino.²⁴ A note on the last leaf supposedly written by Leo says, “of (for) Clare of the city of Assisi,” created a tradition, which can be traced to the early part of the seventeenth century, that Brother Leo copied the manuscript for Clare and her sisters. Van Dijk proposes that this tradition “must be dismissed on historical as well as paleographical grounds.”²⁵

According to Van Dijk, the sanctorale of the *Breviary of S. Clare* is likely to have been copied from a Franciscan breviary, perhaps after Easter of 1234.²⁶ After studying the Office of S. Agnes, this thesis raises some questions. The lessons for the Feast of S. Agnes are greatly abbreviated in the *Breviary of S. Clare*, while the Regula manuscripts, even though their overall agenda was abbreviation, contain the entire *Legend of S. Agnes*. Given this observation, one might imagine that the sanctorale could have been commissioned by the local ordinary of Assisi who was perhaps eager to honor the Franciscan saints of his diocese. In any case, the *Breviary of S. Clare* was not a manuscript used in 1234, by Clare and her sisters.

Two examples of Franciscan, pre-Haymonian breviaries were also studied: Assisi, Sacro Convento, 694²⁷ and Chicago, Newberry Library, 24 (23817).²⁸ The Assisi manuscript, which was most likely produced in the Assisi scriptorium, was used as a model for the copying of other breviaries. Since there were twenty provinces at the time of the 1230 chapter, twenty copies of the *breviaria-antiphonaria*, (or perhaps the original was really a *breviaria-missalia*), were possibly distributed at the chapter. The superior of each province was to insure that adequate copies of these manuscripts were made to provide for the friaries in his province.²⁹ However, in saying this, one must remember that Brothers Leo, Angelo, and Rufino were probably using Francis’s breviary, a pre-Regula breviary, well into the 1240s. Because of their poverty, the

²⁴ Van Dijk worked out his theories concerning the *Breviary of S. Clare* in a series of articles. See “*The Breviary of St. Clare*,” *FS* 8 (1948): 25–46, and the continuation of this same article in *FS* 9 (1949): 351–87. Van Dijk’s final study of this breviary can be found in *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy*, 135–44.

²⁵ Van Dijk, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy*, 135–36.

²⁶ Van Dijk, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy*, 140, 144.

²⁷ For a description of this manuscript see, Stephen Van Dijk, “Some Manuscripts of the Earliest Franciscan Liturgy,” *FS* 14 (1954): 257–58.

²⁸ Van Dijk describes this manuscript in the continuation of his article, “Some Manuscripts of the Earliest Franciscan Liturgy,” *FS* 16 (1956): 60–67.

²⁹ Van Dijk, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy*, 214.

friars used what they had, accepting books that had been discarded by others and updating them as they could.

In regard to the Office of S. Agnes, the text of the nine lessons as well as the antiphons and responsories for the January 21st feast in the Assisi and Newberry manuscripts are essentially the same—a simple division of the entire Roman *Legend of S. Agnes* ending with the account of Agnes's death and burial on the feastday, and completing the legend, in three lessons, during the octave. Although the agenda of the Regula breviary was abbreviation, the Feast of S. Agnes and its *Legend* were left untouched.

Two Prague manuscripts were also studied.³⁰ The first, the so-called *Franciscan Breviary* housed in the Prague Museum of Decorative Arts, does not contain lessons for the Agnes feast. *The Osek Lectionary* (circa 1270), preserved in the National Library in Prague, is known for its splendid illuminated representation of Agnes of Prague with Agnes of Rome. The illumination is found at the beginning of the readings for the January 21st feast of S. Agnes of Rome. Written in a wonderfully clear script, unlike that of the Regula breviaries, *The Osek Lectionary* for the Feast of S. Agnes contains the full text of the first and second lessons of Regula breviary, Sacro Convento, 694. The second *Osek* lesson, continues without a break into the third Sacro Convento, 694 lesson. It ends in the middle of a sentence and then continues with a small portion of the second Sacro Convento, 694 lesson for the octave. The third lesson of *The Osek Lectionary* continues with the text of the Regula octave's second lesson and goes to the end of the Roman *Legend*. It is obvious that the *Osek Lectionary* is based on an entirely different model for the divisions and use of the Agnes lessons than the Regula model.

Can one find any clues that Clare may have relied on the lessons for Matins of the Office of S. Agnes from the text of her letters? Upon examination of the manuscripts, it was noted that Clare's use of the *Legend* in *ILAg* 10–11, seems to prohibit a source similar to the *Breviary of S. Francis*, since this breviary divides Clare's text between two lessons. Of lesser importance is the observation that the text of the *Legend* seemingly alluded to by Clare in *ILAg* 7, is excluded from the

³⁰ For a description of these manuscripts see, Helena Soukupová, *Anežský klášter v Praze* (Prague: Odeon, 1989), 158–69. See also Helena Soukupová, "Illuminované rukopisy z kláštera bl. Anežky v Praze Na Františku," *Časopis Národního Muzea v Praze* 153 (1984): 69–95.

abbreviated lessons found in the *Breviary of S. Francis*, the *Breviary of S. Clare*, and the *Osek Lectionary*. If one wants to examine the hypothesis of a breviary source, one must do this by means of a breviary manuscript that contains all the text from the *Agnes Legend* alluded to by Clare. Hence, in our analysis, the Assisi Regula breviary, Sacro Convento, 694, is a possible source. Although this observation does not assure the belief that Clare and/or Agnes had the use of a Regula breviary, it certainly provides evidence toward such a conclusion.

There is also the possibility that Clare is not using the text of the *Legend of S. Agnes* at all, but is relying on antiphons and responsories from the Agnes Office. This hypothesis, which some scholars have espoused,³¹ also needs to be tested.

There are a variety of ways to proceed. One could merely extract from Clare's letters all quotes, paraphrases, and allusions to the Office of S. Agnes of Rome and demonstrate these parallels to the reader. This method is advantageous in that it could succinctly provide evidence of Clare's possible dependence on the Office of Matins for the Feast of S. Agnes in her letters to Agnes of Prague. However, the very terseness of this method would deprive the reader of any familiarity with the experience Clare and Agnes had of the Agnes Office. Alternatively, one might reproduce the Agnes Office in its entirety. The disadvantage of this method is that the length and enticement of this Office might divert the reader from the task of comparing Clare's letters with the text of the Office. Therefore, I will proceed by way of a compromise route, giving an abbreviated form of the Agnes Office followed by a comparison of relevant passages from the letters of Clare. By using this method, I hope to offer readers an abbreviated sense of the Damianites possible experience of the Agnes Office, as well as focus readers on the examination of Clare's use of the *Agnes Legend* in her letters.

Below is an outline of the Office of Matins for the Feast of S. Agnes of Rome taken from the Regula breviary with special emphasis on the lessons of the Office that Clare quoted, paraphrased, or alluded to in her letters to Agnes of Prague.³² Matins for the January 21st feast

³¹ See for example, Jan Kapistrán Vyskočil, *Legenda Blahoslavené Anežský a čtyři listy Sv. Kláry*, trans. Vitus Buresh (Prague: Nakladatelství Universum, 1932), 177–78, and Regis Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York: New City Press, 2006), 44, 50–51, who site only antiphons and responsories as the sources of specific verses of Clare's use of the *Agnes Legend*.

³² Translations of the lessons are by my colleague, Julia Fleming, Ph.D., of Creighton University. Because of the length of the lessons, only those necessary for understanding the basic spirit of the Agnes Office and for studying Clare's use of the text

contained nine psalms with antiphons and nine readings with responsories divided into three nocturns. In this rendering, neither the author nor the translator wishes to provide a paleographical transcription of the Office. For those interested in the history of the Office of S. Agnes, a more technical study would be needed. The purpose of this study is to explore Clare's use of the Agnes *Legend* in comparison with its use in the Regula breviary.

Matins for the Office
of the Feast of S. Agnes of Rome

First Nocturn

First Antiphon

Discede a me, pabulum mortis, quia
iam ab alio amatore praeventa sum.

Depart from me, food of death,
because I have already been
taken by another lover.

Psalm 1: Beatus vir.

Happy is the one.

Second Antiphon

Dexteram meam, et collum meum
cinxit lapidibus pretiosis: tradidit
auribus meis inestimabiles
margaritas.

My right hand and my neck he
encircled with precious stones; he
hung priceless pearls from my ears.

Psalm 2: Quare fremuerunt.

Why do they rage?

Third Antiphon

Posuit signum in faciem meam, ut
nullum praeter eum amatorem
admittam.

He placed a seal on my face, so
that I will admit no lover except
him.

Psalm 3: Domine quid multiplicati.

Lord, how many.

First Lesson

Servus Christi Ambrosius Virginibus
sacris. Diem festum sanctissimae
virginis celebremus. Hinc psalmi
resonant, inde concrepent lectiones.
Hinc populorum turbae laetentur,
inde sublevantur pauperes Christi.
Omnes ergo gratulemur in domino,

Ambrose, the servant of Christ, to
the holy virgins. Let us celebrate
the feast day of a most holy virgin.
On one side, let the psalms echo;
on the other, let the readings
sound. On one side, let the crowds
of people rejoice; on the other,

in her letters will be reproduced in this essay. The full text of the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* can be found in the appendix of this chapter. The lessons both here and in the appendix are divided according to the Assisi Regula breviary manuscript, Sacro Convento, 694.

et ad aedificationem virginum,
qualiter passa sit beatissima Agnes,
ad memoriam revocemus. Tertio-
decimo aetatis suae anno mortem
perdidit, et vitam invenit, quia solum
vitae dilexit auctorem. Infantia
computabatur in annis, sed erat
senectus mentis immensa: corpore
quidem juvencula, sed animo cana;
pulchra facie, sed pulchrior fide.

Dum a scholis reverteretur, urbis filio
adamatur. Cuius parentes cum
requisisset coepit offerre plurima et
plura promittere. Denique detulerat
secum pretiosissima ornamenta, quae
a beata Agne veluti quaedam sunt
stercora recusata. Unde factum est,
ut juvenis majori perurgeretur
amoris stimulo.

Et putans eam meliora velle
accipere ornamenta, omnem lapidum
pretiosorum secum defert gloriam:
et per seipsum, et per amicos et notos
et affines coepit aures virginis
appellare; divitias, domos, posses-
siones, familias, atque omnes mundi
delicias promittere, si consensum
suum eius coniugio non negaret.

First Responsory

℟) Diem festum sacratissimae virginis
celebremus: qualiter passa sit beata
Agnes, ad memoriam revocemus:
tertiodecimo aetatis suae anno
mortem perdidit, et vitam invenit:

let Christ's poor be encouraged.
Let us all, therefore, give solemn
thanks to the Lord, and for the
edification of the virgins, recall in
how excellent a manner the most
blessed Agnes suffered! In the
thirteenth year of her youth, she
lost death and found life, because
she loved the sole Author of Life.
She was reckoned an infant in
years, but had the wisdom of an
elder; youthful indeed in body, but
white-haired in spirit; lovely in
form, but lovelier in faith.

While she was returning from
school, the son of the urban
prefect fell in love with her. When
he had inquired about her parents,
he began to offer many things and
to make many promises. Finally,
he brought with him extremely
precious ornaments, which were
refused by the Blessed Agnes as
if they were dung. As a result, the
young man was spurred by a more
intense goad of love.

Thinking that she wished to
receive better ornaments, he
brought with him every status
symbol [including] the most
precious stones, and on his own
behalf, and through his friends,
acquaintances, and relatives, began
to accost the virgin's ears to promise
riches, houses, possessions, estates,
and indeed all the world's delights,
if she would not refuse her consent
to marry him.

℟) Let us celebrate the feast day of
a most holy virgin! Let us recall in
how excellent a manner the blessed
Agnes suffered! In the thirteenth
year of her youth, she lost death

*Quia solum vitae dilexit auctorem.

v) Infantia quidem computabatur in annis; sed erat senectus mentis immensa.

// Quia solum vitae dilexit auctorem.

and found life, *because she loved the sole Author of Life.

v) She was reckoned an infant in years, but had the wisdom of an elder.

// Because she loved the sole Author of Life.

Second Lesson

Beata Agnes tale juveni fertur dedisse responsum: Discede a me fomes peccati, nutrimentum facinoris, pabulum mortis: discede a me, quia iam ab alio amatore praeventa sum, qui mihi satis meliora obtulit ornamenta, et annulo, fidei suae subarrhavit me, longe te nobilior et genere et dignitate. Ornavit inaeestimabili dextro chiro dexteram meam, et collum meum cinxit lapidibus pretiosis. Tradidit auribus meis inaeestimabiles margaritas, et circumdedit me vernantibus atque coruscantibus gemmis.

Posuit signum in faciem meam, ut nullum praeter amatorem admittam. Induit me cyclade auro texta, et immensis monilibus ornavit me. Ostendit mihi thesauros incomparabiles, quos mihi se donaturum si ei perseveravero repromisit.

Non ergo potero ad contumeliam prioris amatoris vel adspicere alium, et illum derelinquere, cum quo sum caritate devincta: cuius est generositas celsior, possibilitas fortior, adspectus pulchrior, amor suavior, et omni gratia elegantior: a quo mihi iam thalamus collocatus est, cuius mihi organa modulatis vocibus resonant, cuius

To these things, Blessed Agnes is said to have given the young man this kind of response: "Depart from me, kindling of sin, nourishment of villainy, food of death. Depart from me, because I have already been taken by another lover, who presented me with even better ornaments than you have, and put me under a pledge with the ring of his fidelity, [who is] far nobler than you in birth and position. He adorned my right hand with a priceless bracelet, and encircled my neck with precious stones. He hung priceless pearls from my ears, and surrounded me with glittering and sparkling gems.

He placed a seal on my face, so that I will admit no lover except him. He clothed me in a robe of state woven with gold, and adorned me with innumerable necklaces. He showed me incomparable treasures, which he promised to give to me if I persevere with him.

Therefore, I am unable to consider another, to the insult of my prior lover, or to desert him, with whom I have been bound by love: whose nobility is higher, his power stronger, his appearance lovelier, his love sweeter, and his every grace more elegant—by whom a marriage bed has already been prepared for

mihi virgines iustissimis vocibus
cantant. Iam mel et lac ex eius ore
suscepi iam amplexibus eius castis
adstricta sum.

Second Responsory

℞) Dexteram meam, et collum meum
cinxit lapidibus pretiosis, tradidit
auribus meis inestimabiles
margaritas,

*Et circumdedit me vernantibus, atque
coruscantibus gemmis.

℣) Posuit signum in faciem meam, ut
nullum praeter eum amatorem
admittam.

// Et circumdedit me vernantibus.

Third Lesson

Iam corpus eius corpori meo
sociatum est, et sanguis eius ornavit
genas meas. Cuius mater virgo est,
cuius pater feminam nescit. Cui angeli
serviunt, cuius pulchritudinem sol et
luna mirantur. Cuius odore reviviscunt
mortui, cuius tacta foventur infirmi.
Cuius opes numquam deficiunt, cuius
divitiae non decrescunt. Ipsi soli servo
fidem. Ipsi me tota devotione
committo.

Quem cum amavero, casta sum;
cum tetigero, munda sum; cum
accepero, virgo sum. Nec deerunt
post nuptias filii, ubi partus sine
dolore succedit, et foecunditas
quotidiana cumulatur.

Audiens haec insanus iuvenis,
amore carpitur caeco, et inter
angustias animi et corporis, anhelat
cruciatur spiritu. Inter haec lecto

me; his instruments echo for me
in measured tones; whose virgins
sing for me with the most perfect
voices. Already, I have received
milk and honey from his mouth;
already, I have been held fast in his
chaste embraces.”

℞) My right hand and my neck he
encircled with precious stones. He
hung priceless pearls from my ears,

*and surrounded me with glittering
and sparkling gems.

℣) He placed a seal on my face, so
that I will admit no lover except
him.

// And surrounded me with
glittering.

“Already, his body has been
united with my body, and his
blood has adorned my cheeks. His
mother is a virgin; his father has
never known a woman. Angels
serve him, whose beauty the sun
and moon admire; by whose
fragrance the dead revive, by
whose touch the sick are relieved,
whose wealth never fails, whose
riches do not diminish. I keep faith
with him alone. To him, I commit
myself with complete devotion.

Having loved him, I am chaste;
having touched him, I am pure;
having received him, I am a virgin.
Nor will children be lacking after
marriage, when birth advances
without sadness, and fruitfulness is
increased every day.”

Hearing these things, the crazed
young man, harassed by blind
love, and in the midst of mental
and physical difficulties, was

prosternitur, et per alta suspiria amor
a medicis aperitur. Fiunt nota patri;
quae fuerant inventa a medicis; et
eadem paterna voce, quae fuerant iam
dicta a filio, ad petitionem virginis
revolvuntur.

Abnegat Agnes beatissima, et se
nullo pacto asserit prioris sponsi
foedera violare. Cumque pater diceret,
in fascibus constitutum se praefect-
uram agere, et idcirco sibi, quamvis
illustrissimum, minime debere
praeferre; coepit tamen vehementer
inquirere, quis esset sponsus, de cuius
se Agnes potestate iactaret.

Exstitit quidam ex parasitis eius, qui
diceret hanc Christianam esse ab
infantia, et magicis artibus ita
occupatam, ut dicat Christum suum
sponsum esse.

Third Responsory

℞) Amo Christum, in cuius thalamum
introibo, cuius mater virgo est, cuius
pater feminam nescit, cuius mihi
organa modulatis vocibus cantant:

*Quem cum amavero, casta sum; cum
tetigero, munda sum; cum accepero,
virgo sum.

v) Annulo fidei suae subarrhavit me,
et immensis monilibus ornavit me.

// Quem.

tortured by wheezing. Meanwhile,
he prostrated himself on his bed,
and through his deep sighs, love
became visible to the doctors.

What the doctors found became
known to his father; and in order
to petition the virgin, the father's
voice reiterated the same things
already said by the son.

The most blessed Agnes refused,
and asserted that she would not
violate the covenant with her
prior spouse by any agreement.
Although the father said that
he had been established in
magisterial authority to discharge
the prefecture, and for that
reason, ought by no means to give
precedence [to another], however
distinguished, over himself; never-
theless, he began to inquire
energetically, who the husband
might be, about whose power
Agnes was bragging.

Then one of his toadies arose,
who said she had been a Christian
from infancy, and was so possessed
by magic arts that she said that
Christ was her husband.

℞) I love Christ, into whose
marriage bed I will enter. His
mother is a virgin; his father has
never known a woman. His
instruments sing for me in
measured tones. *Having loved
him I am chaste; having touched him
I am pure; having received him, I
am a virgin.

v) He put me under a pledge with
the ring of his fidelity, and adorned
me with innumerable necklaces.

// Having.

Second Nocturn

Fourth Antiphon

Induit me dominus cyclade auro texta, et immensis monilibus ornavit me.	The Lord clothed me in a robe of state woven with gold, and adorned me with innumerable necklaces.
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Psalm 4: Cum invocarem.	When I call.
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Fifth Antiphon

Mel et lac ex eius ore suscepi, et sanguis eius ornavit genas meas.	I have received milk and honey from his mouth, and his blood has adorned my cheeks.
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Psalm 5: Verba mea.	My words.
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Sixth Antiphon

Ipsi soli servo fidem, ipsi me tota devotione committo.	I keep faith with him alone. To him, I commit myself with complete devotion.
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Psalm 8: Domine dominus noster.	O Lord, our Lord.
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Lessons 4–6 (Synopsis)

Agnes will not alter her position even after the prefect attempts to seduce her with flattery, threatens her, and appeals to her parents. Finally, he threatens her with the charge of blasphemy, giving her the choice of either sacrificing to the goddess Vesta or whoring with prostitutes in a brothel. Upon her refusal to sacrifice to Vesta, the prefect charges Agnes with blasphemy, and orders her to be stripped and led naked to a brothel. As soon as she is stripped, her hair becomes so thick that it hides her nakedness and she is surrounded by a wondrous light. When she prostrates herself in prayer to the Lord, the whitest possible outer garment appears before her eyes and the brothel becomes a place of prayer.

Fourth Responsory

℟) Induit me dominus vestimento
salutis, et indumento laetitiae
circumdedit me.

*Et tanquam sponsam, decoravit me
corona.

℣) Tradidit auribus meis inestimabiles margaritas, et circumdedit me vernantibus, atque coruscantibus gemmis.

// Et tanquam.

℟) The Lord has clothed me with the garments of salvation, and has surrounded me with a robe of joy.

*And He has adorned me with a crown like a bride.

℣) He hung priceless pearls from my ears, and surrounded me with glittering and sparkling gems.

// And He.

Fifth Responsory

℟) Mel et lac ex eius ore suscepi,
*et sanguis eius ornavit genas meas.

℟) I have received milk and honey
from his mouth, *and his blood
has adorned my cheeks.

v) Ostendit mihi thesauros incompar-
abiles, quos mihi se donaturum
repromisit.
// Et sanquis.

v) He showed me incomparable
treasures, which he promised to
give to me.
// And his blood.

Sixth Responsory

℟) Iam corpus eius corpori meo
sociatum est, et sanguis eius ornavit
genas meas:
*cuius mater virgo est: cuius pater
feminam nescit.

℟) Already, his body has been
united with my body, and his
blood has adorned my cheeks.
*His mother is a virgin; his father
has never known a woman.

v) Ipsi sum desponsata, cui angeli
serviunt, cuius pulchritudinem sol et
luna mirantur.
// Cuius mater.

v) I am wedded to him whom the
angels serve, whose beauty the sun
and moon admire.
// His mother.

Third Nocturn

Seventh Antiphon

Cuius pulchritudinem sol et luna
mirantur, ipsi soli servo fidem.

Whose beauty the sun and moon
admire, I keep faith with him alone.

Psalm 15: Domine quis.

Lord who.

Eighth Antiphon

Christus circumdedit me vernantibus,
atque coruscantibus gemmis pretiosis.

Christ surrounded me with glitter-
ing and sparkling, precious gems.

Psalm 45: Eructavit.

[My heart] overflows.

Ninth Antiphon

Ipsi sum desponsata, cui angeli
serviunt: cuius pulchritudinem sol et
luna mirantur.

I am wedded to him whom the
angels serve, whose beauty the sun
and moon admire.

Psalm 46: Deus noster refugium.

God is our refuge.

Lessons 7–8 (synopsis)

The prefect's son comes to the brothel and, without reverence for the angelic light surrounding Agnes, rushes in with the intention of assaulting her. Before he can touch her, he falls on his face and dies. The crowd is convinced that Agnes has used sorcery to kill the young man. When the prefect approaches Agnes and asks her the reason for his son's death, Agnes explains that the young man was imprudent,

not showing reverence before the angelic splendor. Agnes prays and the young man is raised and publicly confesses the Christian God. At this, the soothsayers and temple priests grow angry and demand that the prefect get rid of the sorceress. Appointing a deputy to deal with the uprising, the prefect leaves the scene. The deputy tries to burn Agnes, but the blaze does not touch her.

Seventh Responsory

℟) Ipsi sum desponsata, cui angeli
serviunt, cuius pulchritudinem sol et
luna mirantur.

*Ipsi soli servo fidem. Ipsi me tota
devotione committo.

℣) Dexteram meam, et collum meum
cinxit lapidibus pretiosis: tradidit
auribus meis inestimabiles
margaritas.

// Ipsa soli.

Eighth Responsory

℟) Omnipotens adorande, colende,
tremende, benedico te;

*Quia per filium tuum unigenitum,
evasi minas hominum impiorum, et
spurcitias diaboli, impolluto calle
transivi.

℣) Te confiteor labiis, te corde, te totis
visceribus concupisco.

// Quia.

Ninth Lesson (1st Part)

Tunc beata Agnes expandens
manus suas in medio ignis his verbis
orationem fudit ad dominum:

Omnipotens, adorande, colende, tre-
mende, Pater Domini nostri Iesus
Christi, benedico te, quia per filium
tuum unigenitum evasi minas homi-
num impiorum et spurcitias diaboli
impolluto calle transivi. Ecce et nunc
per Spiritum sanctum rore coelesti
perfusa sum: focus iuxta me moritur,

℟) I am wedded to him whom the
angels serve, whose beauty the sun
and moon admire.

*I keep faith with him alone. To
him, I commit myself with
complete devotion.

℣) My right hand and my neck he
encircled with precious stones; he
hung priceless pearls from my ears.

// I keep.

℟) Almighty [Father], who
inspires adoration, worship, and
awe, I bless you;

*because through your only
begotten Son I have escaped the
threats of impious persons and
passed through the devil's impuri-
ties by an undefiled footpath.

℣) I desire to confess you with my
lips, with my heart, with my entire
inmost being.

// Because.

Then Blessed Agnes, stretching
out her hands in the middle of the
fire, poured out a prayer to the
Lord in these words: "Almighty
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who inspires adoration, worship,
and awe, I bless you, because
through your only begotten Son I
have escaped the threats of impious
persons and passed through the
devil's impurities by an undefiled

flamma dividitur, et ardor incendii huius ad eos, a quibus ministratur refunditur. Benedico te, Pater praedicande, qui etiam inter flammās intrepidam me ad te pervenire permittis. Ecce iam quod credidi, video; quod speravi, iam teneo; quod concupivi, complector.

footpath. And now behold, I have been steeped in heavenly dew through the Holy Spirit: the altarpire near me dies; the flame is divided; and the heat of this fire is poured back upon those by whom it is supplied. I bless you, Father, who must be praised, for you permit me to come to you without fear, even in the midst of the flames. Behold what I believed, I already see; what I have hoped for, I already hold; what I have desired, I embrace."

CLARE'S USE OF THE AGNES OFFICE IN HER LETTERS

Quotations

We have already noted that Clare rarely quotes her sources directly, but rather varies them to fit her purpose. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of her references to the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* are paraphrases or allusions rather than direct quotations.

In 3LAg 15, Clare writes: "And completely ignoring all those who in this deceitful and turbulent world ensnare their blind lovers, you might totally love him who gave himself totally out of love for you." One could certainly read this statement with the *Legend* in mind. Clare follows this with a quotation from the *Legend*, 3rd lesson. Repeated in the 6th and 7th responsories, and in the 7th and 9th antiphons, the line plays like a refrain throughout the Office of Matins.

The Legend of S. Agnes
3rd Lesson

3LAg 16

cuius pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur [whose beauty the sun and moon admire].

cuius pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur [whose beauty the sun and moon admire].

While this passage needs to be cited as Clare's only direct quote of the *Legend*, it, as well the responsories and antiphons that quote it, cannot explain Clare's free construction around the *cuius* passages of the *Legend*. The full passage of 3LAg 16 reads: "whose beauty the sun

and moon admire, and whose rewards, in both their preciousness and magnitude, are without end.” Obviously the rest of the passage will need another explanation.

Paraphrases

Clare’s possible dependence upon the Agnes Office is shown most convincingly in her paraphrases and allusions to the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome*. Her dependence on this *Legend* is especially obvious in her variations on passages that are not repeated in responsories or antiphons. In order to compose these variants, Clare needed to have knowledge of the *Legend* itself.

Clare plays with the *cuius* construction found in the *Legend of S. Agnes*, 2nd and 3rd lessons, in both her third and fourth letters. Although for the most part, she improvises rather freely using this construction, the use of her direct quote in the third letter, already noted as explaining only half of 3LAg 16, and her variant, “whose fragrance will revive the dead” in 4LAg 13, make it clear that Clare is writing a variation on the *Legend*. None of the antiphons and responsories for the Feast of S. Agnes carry the repetitive *cuius* construction. Clare’s source of this construction was the *Legend* itself.

The Legend of S. Agnes
3rd Lesson

4LAg 10–13

Cui angeli serviunt, **cuius pulchritudinem** sol et luna **mirantur. Cuius odore reviviscunt mortui**, cuius tacta fovetur infirmi. Cuius opes numquam deficiunt, cuius divitiae non decrescunt [Angels serve him, whose beauty the sun and moon admire; by whose fragrance the dead revive; by whose touch the sick are relieved; whose wealth never fails; whose riches do not diminish].

cuius pulchritudinem omnia beata caelorum agmina incessabiliter **admirantur**, cuius affectus afficit, cuius contemplatio reficit, cuius implet benignitas, cuius replet suavitas, cuius memoria lucescit suaviter, **cuius odore mortui reviviscunt**, cuiusque visio gloriosa beatificabit omnes cives supernae Ierusalem [whose beauty all the blessed hosts of the heavens unceasingly admire, whose affection moves, whose contemplation invigorates, whose generosity fills, whose sweetness replenishes, whose remembrance pleasantly brings light, whose fragrance will revive the dead, and whose glorious vision will bless all the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem].

In *ILAg* 8, one finds a variant quotation from the 3rd lesson (repeated in the 3rd responsory), wherein Clare changes the text of the *Legend* from the first to second person in order to address Agnes of Prague:

The Legend of S. Agnes
3rd Lesson

ILAg 8

Quem cum amavero, casta sum; cum tetigero, munda sum; cum accepero, virgo sum [Having loved him, I am chaste; having touched him, I am pure; having received him, I am a virgin].

Quem cum amaveritis, casta estis; cum tetigeritis, mundior efficiemini; cum acceperitis virgo estis [Having loved him, you are chaste; having touched him, you will be made more pure; having received him, you are a virgin].

In *ILAg* 9, Clare paraphrases a part of the 2nd lesson that is not repeated as either an antiphon or responsory.

The Legend of S. Agnes
2nd Lesson

ILAg 9

cuius est generositas celsior, possibilitas fortior, adspectus pulchrior, amor suavior, et omni gratia elegantior [Whose nobility is higher, his power stronger, his appearance lovelier, his love sweeter, and his every grace more elegant].

Cuius possibilitas fortior, generositas celsior, cuius aspectus pulchrior, amor suavior et omnis gratia elegantior [His power is stronger, his nobility higher, his appearance lovelier, his love sweeter, and his every grace more elegant].

The first line of *ILAg* 10 is found only at the end of the 2nd lesson:

The Legend of S. Agnes
2nd Lesson

ILAg 10

iam amplexibus eius castis adstricta sum [already, I have been held fast in his chaste embraces].

Cuius estis iam amplexibus astricta [You are now held fast in the embraces of the one].

The other lines of *1LAg* 10 and the first two lines of *1LAg* 11 are also adapted from the 2nd lesson. Although the 2nd, 4th, and 7th responsories and the 2nd and 8th antiphons contain some of this same text, they do not use the verb *ornavit* which Clare borrows from the *Legend*. To explain Clare's entire text, one must refer to the 2nd lesson of the *Legend*.

The Legend of S. Agnes
2nd Lesson

1LAg 10–11a

Ornavit inaestimabili dextro chirio dexteram **meam**, et collum meum cinxit **lapidibus pretiosis**. **Tradidit auribus meis inaestimabiles margaritas, et circumdedit me vernantibus atque coruscantibus gemmis** [He adorned my right hand with a priceless bracelet, and encircled my neck with precious stones. He hung priceless pearls from my ears, and surrounded me with glittering and sparkling gems].

qui pectus **vestrum ornavit lapidibus pretiosis et vestris auribus tradidit inaestimabiles margaritas**. Et totam **circumdedit vernantibus atque coruscantibus gemmis** [who has adorned your breast with precious stones and has hung priceless pearls from your ears. He has completely surrounded you with glittering and sparkling gems].

Clare expresses her eschatological joy at her privilege of being united to the Poor Christ using the words of the Agnes *Legend*. In *3LAg* 5, Clare paraphrases Agnes of Rome stating that her joy is based on the fulfilled longing of her heart.

The Legend of S. Agnes
9th Lesson

3LAg 6

Ecce iam quod credidi, video; quod speravi, **iam teneo; quod concupivi, complector** [Behold, what I believed, I already see; what I have hoped for, I already hold; what I have desired, I embrace].

cum, **quod** sub caelo **cuncupivi iam tenens** [since I already possess what under heaven I have yearned for].

In *3LAg* 7, Clare takes the scriptural image of a treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44; 2 Corinthians 4:7), and juxtaposes this scriptural

allusion onto the incomparable treasures found in the *Agnes Legend*, 2nd lesson and repeated in the 5th responsory. The adjective *incomparabiles* is not from Matthew 13:44 or 2 Corinthians 4:7, but is borrowed from the *Legend of S. Agnes*.

The Legend of S. Agnes
2nd Lesson

3LAg 7

Ostendit mihi thesauros incomparabiles, quos mihi se donaturum si ei perserveravero repromisit [He showed me incomparable treasures, which he promised to give to me if I persevere with him].	absconsumque in agro mundi et cordium humanorum thesaurum incomparabilem [the incomparable treasure that lies hidden in the field of the world and the hearts of human beings].
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Allusions

Instead of jumping directly into a paraphrase of the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome*, Clare prepares her reader with two allusions to the *Legend*. In 1LAg 5–7, which introduces text taken from the *Legend*, Clare states:

I rejoice because you, more than others, could have enjoyed public ostentation, honors, and worldly status having had the opportunity to become, with eminent glory, legitimately married to the illustrious emperor, as would befit your and his pre-eminence. Spurning all these things with your whole heart and mind, you have chosen instead holiest poverty and physical want, accepting a nobler spouse, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will keep your virginity always immaculate and inviolate.

Verses 5–6 could be imagined as an interesting synopsis of the *Agnes Legend* applied to Agnes of Prague. Clare seems to be suggesting that Agnes of Prague is a new S. Agnes.

Clare's last phrase contains two interesting and complex ideas. The first is the acceptance of "a nobler spouse," the second, the notion of immaculate and inviolate virginity. Clare's idea of "accepting a nobler spouse" incorporates vocabulary found in the 2nd lesson of the *Agnes Office*:

The Legend of S. Agnes
2nd Lesson

1LAg 7

quia iam ab alio amatore praeven-
sum, qui mihi satis meliora obtulit
ornamenta, et annulo, fidei suae
subarrhavit me, longe te **nobilior** et
genere et dignitate
[because I have already been taken
by another lover, who presented me
with even better ornaments than you
have, and put me under a pledge
with the ring of his fidelity, (who
is) far nobler than you in birth and
position].

sponsum **nobilioris generis**
accipientes, Dominum Iesum
Christum, qui vestram virginitatem
semper immaculatam custodiet et
illaesam
[accepting a nobler spouse, the Lord
Jesus Christ, who will keep your
virginity always immaculate and
inviolat].

The concept that the choice of Jesus Christ is the better choice, taken from the *Agnes Legend* and carrying overtones of the Martha and Mary story (Luke 10:38–42), evolves into a medieval theology of virginity. Although the idea of defining a woman’s choice of virginity as a spiritual marriage to Christ was not new to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the paradigm governing considerations on this theme, namely the nature of the marital bond between the Blessed Virgin and Joseph, was novel. Hugh of S. Victor (d. 1141), suggested that the physical act of coition was foreign to the original nature of Adam and Eve’s relationship in Eden before the Fall. According to Hugh, the ideal marriage is a spiritual bond and is experienced most fully when it is not consummated. The sacramentality of marriage is conceived as a spiritual union of love between two souls. “Chaste marriages,” well known in the Franciscan tradition, were heir to this spirituality.

Hugh’s system readily transferred to female monastic spirituality. Since sexuality is not necessary in marriage, a female religious could enjoy spiritual marital union with Jesus Christ. It logically followed that this marital union with Jesus Christ had more to recommend it than human marriage. Medieval women writers, who prayed Matins for the Feast of S. Agnes annually, describe this union with Jesus Christ as more noble, more chaste, more rich, etc., often leaving the medieval man in rivalry for feminine affections with the very person of Jesus Christ.³³

³³ For further development of this theme in early medieval women’s literature, see

Clare's second allusion to the *Agnes Legend* in *1LAg* 7, is that Christ "will keep [*custodiet*] your virginity always immaculate and inviolate." In the 5th lesson, (part of the following text is repeated in Lauds, 2nd antiphon),³⁴ Agnes of Rome says to the prefect who demands that she either sacrifice to the goddess Vesta or whore with the prostitutes in a brothel:

The Legend of S. Agnes
5th Lesson

Unde ego quia novi virtutem
Domini mei Iesus Christi, segura
contemno minas tuas, credens quod
neque sacrificem idolis tuis, neque
polluar sordibus alienis. Mecum
enim habeo **custodem** corporis mei
angelum domini. Nam unigenitus
Dei filius, quem ignoras, murus est
mihi impenetrabilis, et **custos** mihi
est numquam dormiens, et defensor
mihi est numquam deficiens.

Accordingly, because I know the
excellence of my Lord Jesus Christ,
I am tranquil and despise your
threats, believing that I will neither
sacrifice to your idols nor be defiled
by others' filth. Indeed, I have with
me my body's **guardian**, an angel of
the Lord. For the only begotten Son
of God, whom you do not know, is
my impenetrable wall of defense, my
guardian who never sleeps, and my
defender who never fails.

This theme is reiterated in the 7th lesson. Here God's fidelity is demonstrated when Agnes's hair miraculously grows so long that it covers her body better than clothing.

The Legend of S. Agnes
7th Lesson

Quia universi dederunt honorem
Deo, qui mihi misit angelum suum,
qui et induit me hoc indumento
misericordiae, et **custodivit** corpus
meum, quod ab ipsis cunabulis
Christo consecratum est et oblatum.

Because without exception they gave
honor to God, who sent his angel to
me, who clothed me in this garment
of mercy, and **guarded** my body,
which from the cradle itself has been
consecrated and presented to Christ.

John Bugge, *'Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal'* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 80–90.

³⁴ Lauds, 2nd antiphon reads: "Mecum enim habeo custodem corporis mei, angelum Domini."

The Franciscan sources contain clues other than this statement in Clare's first letter that suggest that Clare believed that Christ would literally protect her sisters from those who would disrespect their virginal way of life. In Clare's process of canonization, the ninth witness, Sister Francesca, tells how Clare asked Christ to defend her sisters from the invading Saracens who had already entered the S. Damiano enclosure. In response to her urgent prayer, Christ responded "I will always defend you!"³⁵ and with Clare's prayer the Saracens are scattered.

The rape and molestation of nuns were not uncommon in the Middle Ages. Germanic invaders coming into Italy were accustomed to legal systems that were not much concerned with the protection of women.³⁶ Clare's use of the Agnes *Legend* suggests that Clare believed that while God might allow martyrdom, God would protect the virginity of his faithful handmaids. The Saracen episode confirmed her faith.

Using *ILAg* 11b as a hinge, Clare transitions from her paraphrase of the Agnes *Legend* back into prose. *ILAg* 11a reads, "He has completely surrounded you with glittering and sparkling gems." This line, as has been cited, is a paraphrase of the *Legend*. The line that follows it in the *Legend* reads, "He placed a seal/*signum* on my face." Using *signum* as a pivot, Clare brilliantly moves into Sirach 45:14, the primary source for *ILAg* 11b.

<i>The Legend of S. Agnes</i> 2nd Lesson	Sirach 45:14	<i>ILAg</i> 11b
Posuit signum in faciem meam [He placed a seal on my face].	Corona aurea super mitram eius, lamina cum signo sanctitatis [Upon his turban a crown of gold, its plate wrought with the seal of holiness].	atque vos coronavit aurea corona signo sanctitatis expressa [and has placed on your head a golden crown engraved with the seal of holiness].

³⁵ *Process* 9:2.

³⁶ See Vern Bullough and James Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994), 142.

In 4LAg 8, Clare plays on Agnes's name, recalling Agnes of Rome without focusing on the liturgical texts. Note in the Latin, Clare's wonderful wordplay; Agnes of Rome is referred to as *sancta Agnes*, while Christ is referred to as *Agno immaculato*. Their spousal bond makes them: *sancta Agnes, Agno immaculato*.

4LAg 8

quia velut altera virgo sanctissima,
sancta Agnes, Agno immaculato,
 qui tollit peccata mundi, es mirifice
 desponsata, sumptis omnibus
 vanitatibus huius mundi.

because like that other most holy
 virgin, **Saint Agnes**, you have been
 in an astonishing way espoused to
 the **immaculate Lamb**, who, having
 assumed responsibility for all the
 vanities of this world, takes away the
 sins of the world.

In the first lesson for the Octave of the Feast of S. Agnes, Agnes's parents see their daughter after her death in a crowd of virgins and dressed in a garment of light. At her right hand is her spouse, a "lamb whiter than snow."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

If one charts Clare's use of the Agnes Office, the following picture emerges.

TYPE OF CITING	THE LETTERS OF CLARE	THE LEGEND OF S. AGNES OF ROME
<i>Quotations</i>	3LAg 16	3rd lesson (repeated in the 6th and 7th responsories and in the 7th and 9th antiphons; need <i>cuius</i> construction found in the 2nd and 3rd lessons to explain the entire passage)

Table (cont.)

TYPE OF CITING	THE LETTERS OF CLARE	THE LEGEND OF S. AGNES OF ROME
<i>Paraphrases</i>	1LAg 8	3rd lesson (repeated in the 3rd responsory)
	1LAg 9	2nd lesson
	First line of 1LAg 10	2nd lesson
	1LAg 10–11a	2nd lesson (some text repeated from 2nd and 8th antiphons and the 2nd, 4th and 7th responsories, but one needs the 2nd lesson to explain the entire text)
	3LAg 6	9th lesson and Lauds Benedictus antiphon
	3LAg 7	2nd lesson (repeated in the 5th responsory)
<i>Allusions</i>	4LAg 10–13	3rd lesson
	1LAg 7	2nd lesson. For the idea of Jesus Christ defending a woman's virginity, see the 5th–7th lessons.
	1LAg 11b	2nd lesson (repeated in the 3rd antiphon and the 2nd responsory)
	4LAg 8—Word play on the name, "Agnes."	Allusion to the <i>Legend</i> (see 1st lesson for the Octave of S. Agnes).

Given this picture, what might be concluded? The evidence suggests that one can be certain that Clare knew the Agnes *Legend* well, through popular culture, and through the lessons of the annual Office of Matins for the Feast of S. Agnes. Clare drew upon her familiarity with the Agnes *Legend* in writing her letters to Agnes of Prague, whose name recalled for her the famous virgin martyr of Rome.

Given Clare's creativity with embroidering texts into her letters, it is important in translating and in interpreting to understand Clare's

use and source of the Agnes legend. One could hardly explain, for example, Clare's understanding of virginity with its relationship to martyrdom and to poverty without reading Clare's letters in light of the *Agnes Legend*.

In postulating the Agnes Office as Clare's primary source of the *Agnes Legend*, one notes that Clare's dependence upon the text of the *Agnes Legend* is primarily reserved to the 2nd and 3rd lessons of the Agnes Office. The preponderance of the antiphons and responsories in the Office of S. Agnes as well as the quotations from the *Legend* found in the liturgy of the consecration of virgins are also from the 2nd and 3rd lessons. In restricting her paraphrasing to the 2nd and 3rd lessons, Clare follows liturgical precedent.

Although Clare paraphrases primarily from the 2nd and 3rd lessons, she does not restrict herself to the sections of these lessons that were repeated in the antiphons and responsories of the Agnes Office or in the liturgy of the consecration of virgins. This implies that she had greater familiarity with the *Legend* than just a simple reliance on the liturgy of the consecration of virgins or on the antiphons and responsories of the Agnes Office. In proposing a liturgical source for many of Clare's paraphrases and allusions to the *Legend*, it seems more proper to cite the primary source as the lessons while noting various repetitions found in the responsories and antiphons. To do this would be to prescind a bit from common practice.³⁷

A number of witnesses in Clare's canonization process³⁸ testify to Clare's love for prayer at night. Regarding the witness of these sisters, Regis Armstrong states: "The custom of celebrating Matins or the Office of Readings at midnight is not prescribed in the *forma vitae* of S. Clare. Hence this information is invaluable in confirming a practice that still exists in many communities of the Sisters of S. Clare."³⁹ Clare's creative use of the *Agnes Legend* may give further evidence that Clare not only listened well to these texts, but also pondered and prayed them. Her freedom of spirit in quoting the prayer of the seasons, and

³⁷ Scholarly sources for studying the letters of S. Clare quote responsories and antiphons, and sometimes, the *Legend* or Office, but do not cite particular lessons of Matins as Clare's source. In referring to the lessons, one must remember the fluidity of the divisions of the lessons for the Feast of S. Agnes of Rome in early thirteenth-century breviaries. What is important are not the particular lesson divisions, but that the *Legend* is cited as the source of Clare's paraphrases.

³⁸ *Process* 1:7; 2:9; 10:3.

³⁹ *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York: New City Press, 2006), 152, note a.

her ability to associate freely on these texts in liturgical style, testify to Clare's profound love and knowledge of the Office of Matins.

The above analysis demonstrates that Clare used the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* and not simply the antiphons and responsories of the Agnes Office or the liturgy of the consecration of virgins in her letters to Agnes of Prague. Most likely she had knowledge of this *Legend* from both popular and liturgical sources. She presumed that Agnes was familiar with the *Legend* of her own patron saint. In studying the breviary manuscripts, it was hoped that one might prove Clare's further reliance upon other lessons from the Office of Matins, perhaps from the Marian feasts, to strengthen the hypothesis of Clare's reliance upon a breviary source of the Agnes *Legend*. Despite a lengthy search, no such collaborating evidence was found.

Since both Clare and Agnes did share the experience of hearing the *Legend of S. Agnes of Rome* annually, it seems that noting the lessons of the feast, with the pertinent antiphons and responsories, is a fair way to document Clare's source. In practice, however, while writing to Agnes, Clare's ear and heart most likely improvised on a popular memory that had been matured by contemplative, annual reflection on the Agnes story, but also on the rhythms and poetry of the *Legend* as she had heard it as a child from stories told perhaps by her own mother, in parish churches, or in the town squares of Assisi and Perugia.

APPENDIX

The Legend of S. Agnes of Rome
Translated by Julia Fleming, Ph.D.
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Lesson 1⁴⁰

Ambrose, the servant of Christ, to the holy virgins.

Let us celebrate the feast day of a most holy virgin. On one side, let the psalms echo; on the other, let the readings sound. On one side, let the crowds of people rejoice; on the other, let Christ's poor be encouraged. Let us all, therefore, give solemn thanks to the Lord, and for the edification of the virgins recall in how excellent a manner the most blessed Agnes suffered!

In the thirteenth year of her youth, she lost death and found life, because she loved the sole Author of Life. She was reckoned an infant in years, but had the wisdom of an elder; youthful indeed in body, but white-haired in spirit; lovely in form, but lovelier in faith.

While she was returning from school, the son of the urban prefect fell in love with her. When he had inquired about her parents, he began to offer many things and to make many promises.

Finally, he brought with him extremely precious ornaments, which were refused by Blessed Agnes as if they were dung. As a result, the young man was spurred by a more intense goad of love.

Thinking that she wished to receive better ornaments, he brought with him every status symbol [including] the most precious stones, and on his own behalf, and through his friends, acquaintances, and relatives, began to accost the virgin's ears to promise riches, houses, possessions, estates, and indeed all the world's delights, if she would not refuse her consent to marry him.

Lesson 2

To these things Blessed Agnes is said to have given the young man this kind of response: "Depart from me, kindling of sin, nourishment of villainy, food of death. Depart from me, because I have already been taken by another lover, who presented me with even better ornaments

⁴⁰ The lessons of the *Legend* (AASS, January 21) are divided according to Regula breviary manuscript Assisi, Biblioteca Sacro Convento, 694, ff. 269r–275v.

than you have, and put me under a pledge with the ring of his fidelity, [who is] far nobler than you in birth and position. He adorned my right hand with a priceless bracelet, and encircled my neck with precious stones; he hung priceless pearls from my ears, and surrounded me with glittering and sparkling gems.

He placed a seal on my face, so that I will admit no lover except him. He clothed me in a robe of state woven with gold, and adorned me with innumerable necklaces. He showed me incomparable treasures, which he promised to give to me if I persevere with him.

Therefore, I am unable to consider another, to the insult of my prior lover, or to desert him, with whom I have been bound by love: whose nobility is higher, his power stronger, his appearance lovelier, his love sweeter, and his every grace more elegant—by whom a marriage bed has already been prepared for me; whose instruments echo for me in measured tones; whose virgins sing for me with the most perfect voices. Already, I have received milk and honey from his mouth; already, I have been held fast in his chaste embraces.

Lesson 3

Already, his body has been united with my body, and his blood has adorned my cheeks. His mother is a virgin; his father has never known a woman. Angels serve him, whose beauty the sun and moon admire; by whose fragrance the dead revive; by whose touch the sick are relieved; whose wealth never fails; whose riches do not diminish. I keep faith with him alone. To him, I commit myself with complete devotion.

Having loved him, I am chaste; having touched him, I am pure; having received him, I am a virgin. Nor will children be lacking after marriage, when birth advances without sadness, and fruitfulness is increased every day.”

Hearing these things, the crazed young man, harassed by blind love, and in the midst of mental and physical difficulties, was tortured by wheezing. Meanwhile, he prostrated himself on his bed, and through his deep sighs, love became visible to the doctors. What the doctors found became known to his father; and in order to petition the virgin, the father’s voice reiterated the same things already said by the son.

The most blessed Agnes refused, and asserted that she would not violate the covenant with her prior spouse by any agreement. Although the father said that he had been established in magisterial authority to discharge the prefecture, and for that reason, ought by no means

to give precedence [to another], however distinguished, over himself; nevertheless, he began to inquire energetically, who the husband might be, about whose power Agnes was bragging.

Then one of his toadies arose, who said she had been a Christian from infancy, and was so possessed by magic arts that she said that Christ was her husband.

Lesson 4

Hearing these things, the prefect was made happy, and when the attendants had been sent out with a great uproar, ordered her to be brought before his tribunal.

At first, indeed, he challenged her secretly with flattering statements; then he assailed her with terrors. But Christ's virgin was neither seduced by the flattery, nor shaken by fear: and what is more, persevering with the same countenance and the same spirit, in her heart, she mocked him in the same way when he threatened as when he flattered.

And so, the Prefect Symphronius, seeing such constancy in the girl, appealed to her parents. Because they were noble, and he was unable to inflict force upon them, he confronted them with their Christianity.

For on the following day, he commanded that Agnes be presented to him, and, repeating himself again and again, began to review the conversation about the young man's love. When with useless effort his entire argument failed, he ordered her again to appear before his tribunal and said to her: "Unless you are separated from the superstition of the Christians, on account of whose magic arts you flaunt yourself, you will not be able to cast off insanity of heart, or consent to extremely advantageous plans. Thus it is necessary that you hasten to venerate the goddess Vesta, so that, if maintaining virginity pleases you, you may concentrate your attention on reverencing her sacrifices by day and night."

To these things Blessed Agnes said: "If I have refused your son, who though vexed with excessive passion, is nonetheless a living man, a man at least who is capable of reason, who is able to hear and see and caress and walk, and to enjoy completely the brightness of this light with its goods—if, therefore, I am unable for any reason to have regard for him, on account of the love of Christ, how would I be able to worship idols that are mute and deaf, without perception and soul, and, to the injury of God Most High, bend my neck to useless stones?"

Hearing this, Symphronius the prefect said: "I wish to have consideration for your extreme youth, and even now I give respite to your blasphemy of the gods on that account, because I consider you too young to exercise the faculty of judgment. Therefore do not despise yourself in such a way that you incur the reactions of the gods."

Lesson 5

Blessed Agnes said: "Do not so despise the childish body in me that you think that I wish to have your favor. For faith is revealed not in years but in judgments, and the omnipotent God confirms minds rather than particular ages. But in respect to your gods, whose reactions you do not wish me to encounter, let them be angry for themselves; let them speak for themselves; let them warn me about this themselves; let them order themselves to be worshipped; let them command themselves to be adored. Yet since I see that you are straining towards what you will be unable to accomplish, enforce whatever seems appropriate to you."

Prefect Symphronius said: "Choose one of these two things: either sacrifice with the virgins of the goddess Vesta, or you will whore with the prostitutes in the comradeship of the brothel. And far from you will be the Christians, who have so tainted you with [their] magic arts, that you are confident of your ability to endure this misfortune with an intrepid spirit. Thus, as I have said, either sacrifice to the goddess Vesta to your family's glory, or to the dishonor of your parentage, you will be a harlot, publicly degraded."

Then Blessed Agnes spoke with firm resolution: "If you knew who my God was, you would not bring such things from your mouth. Accordingly, because I know the excellence of my Lord Jesus Christ, I am tranquil and despise your threats, believing that I will neither sacrifice to your idols nor be defiled by others' filth. Indeed, I have with me my body's guardian, an angel of the Lord. For the only begotten Son of God, whom you do not know, is my impenetrable wall of defense, my guardian who never sleeps, and my defender who never fails.

Your gods, on the other hand, are either bronze (from which it is better to make kettles for human use), or stones (with which it is better to pave roads to avoid the mud).

Lesson 6

Divinity, then, does not dwell in empty stones, but in the heavens; it does not rest upon bronze, or any metal, but upon high royal power.

However, [as for] you and those like you, unless you retreat from the worship of such things, a similar penalty will bring you to an end.

For just as these things have been melted in order that they might be cast, thus those worshipping them will be melted in perpetual fire; not so as to be cast, but to be cast into destruction for eternity and perish."

In response, the crazed judge ordered her to be stripped and led naked to the brothel, under the stimulus of the crier's voice saying: "Agnes, the virgin, who brings forward sacrilegious blasphemy toward the gods, given as a prostitute to the brothels." But as soon as she had been stripped, with her hair untied, divine grace granted such thickness to its strands that she seemed better concealed by her lovely hanging hair than by garments. Moreover, when she had entered the place of disgrace, she found there the angel of the Lord, provided beforehand in order to surround her with vast light, in such a way that no one was able to touch or see her because of its brilliance. For the entire room was gleaming like the radiant sun in its power, and to the degree that anyone wished to be more curious with his eyes, by so much was the keenness of his vision blunted.

When she had prostrated herself in prayer to the Lord, the whitest possible outer garment appeared before her eyes. Taking it, she dressed herself and said: "I give thanks to you, Lord Jesus Christ, who, counting me among the number of your handmaidens, have commanded this garment to be bestowed upon me." For the garment was so fitted to the proportions of her little body, and so remarkable for its perfect shining whiteness, that no one doubted that it had been prepared only by angelic hands.

Meanwhile, the brothel became a place of prayer, in which everyone who had entered offered petitions and veneration, and, giving honor to the great light, went out purer than he had been when he had come inside.

Lesson 7

While these things were happening, the prefect's son, who was the person responsible for this crime, came to the place, as if to insult the girl, in the company of his young comrades, together with whom he believed he would be able to indulge the derision of his lust.

And when he saw the boys who had entered before him wildly raging with passion, coming out with complete reverence and great admiration, he began to declare them impotent, and indeed to condemn

them as useless, effeminate, and wretched. Deriding them, he boldly entered the place in which the virgin was praying.

And seeing so great a light around her, he did not give honor to God; but when he rushed into the light itself, before he could even touch her with his hand, he fell on his face, and having been choked by the devil, he died.

However his allies, seeing that he was dallying inside, thought that he was engaged in obscene acts. One of the young men, who was his very close friend, went inside, as if to congratulate [him] on his insult; and, finding him dead, cried out in a loud voice, saying: "Help, pious Romans, that prostitute has killed the prefect's son by magic arts!"

Suddenly the people ran together towards the theater and there was a varied outcry from the raging crowd. Some called [her] a sorceress; others, innocent; and some shouted "impious."

But the prefect, hearing that his son had perished, came to the theater with excruciating mental anguish and lamentation. When he entered the place in which his son's body lay lifeless, with a loud cry he said to the most blessed virgin: "Cruellest of all women, did you wish to show the proof of your magic art upon my son?"

When he repeated these things, and indeed other words of this kind, and forcibly demanded the cause of his [son's] death from her, the most blessed Agnes said to him: "He whose will [your son] wished to complete, took him into his power. Why, moreover, are all those who came in to me uninjured? Because without exception they gave honor to God, who sent his angel to me, who clothed me in this garment of mercy, and guarded my body, which from the cradle itself has been consecrated and presented to Christ. Therefore, when they saw the angelic splendor, all worshiped and departed unharmed. But he was imprudent, and, as soon as he had entered, began to rant and rage with passion; when he brought his hand into position to touch me, the angel of the Lord delivered him into the base death which you perceive."

Lesson 8

The prefect said to her: "In this way, it will become apparent that you have not done these things by magic arts, if you entreat the angel himself that he restore my son to me in good health."

To him, Blessed Agnes said: "Although your faith does not deserve to obtain this request from the Lord, nevertheless, because it is time for the supremacy of my Lord Jesus Christ to be made evident, all of you go outside so that I may offer him the customary prayer."

When all had gone out, prostrating herself upon her face and weeping, she began to ask the Lord to revive the young man. As she was praying, moreover, the angel of the Lord appeared who raised her up as she wept, and, comforting her spirit, revived the youth.

When [the young man] had gone outside, he began to cry aloud publicly, saying: "There is one God in heaven, and on earth, and in the sea, who is the God of the Christians. For all the temples are worthless; the gods who are worshiped are all unreliable, and completely unable to offer any help to themselves or to others."

At this cry, all the soothsayers and temple priests were thrown into confusion, and because of them, the people's unrest became even more violent than it had been before. Indeed, they were all crying with one voice: "Get rid of the sorceress; get rid of the evil-doer who both alters minds and changes hearts."

However the prefect, seeing such marvels, was astounded. But fearing proscription, if he acted against the temple priests and befriended Agnes in opposition to his own decrees, he left behind a deputy judge to deal with the people's uprising. However, he went away sad, because he was not able to free her after the resuscitation of his son.

Then the deputy, Aspasius by name, ordered a massive fire to be kindled in the sight of all, and commanded that she be cast into the middle of the flames. When this had been done, immediately the flames were divided into two parts, and on one side and the other the flames consumed the turbulent people. Yet in between, the blaze did not touch Blessed Agnes at all. So much more did the people assign this not to divine powers, but to black magic, that among themselves they uttered groans and infinite cries to heaven.

Lesson 9

Then Blessed Agnes, stretching out her hands in the middle of the fire, poured out a prayer to the Lord in these words: "Almighty Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who inspires adoration, worship, and awe, I bless you, because through your only begotten Son I have escaped the threats of impious persons and passed through the devil's impurities by an undefiled footpath. And now behold, I have been steeped in heavenly dew through the Holy Spirit: the altar-pyre near me dies; the flame is divided; and the heat of this fire is poured back upon those by whom it is supplied. I bless you, Father, who must be praised, for you permit me to come to you without fear, even in the midst of the flames. Behold what I believed, I already see; what I have hoped for, I already hold; what I have desired, I embrace. I confess you with my lips and

I long for you with my heart, with my entire inmost being. Behold, I am coming to you, the only true God; who with our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, and with the Holy Spirit, live and reign throughout all ages forever, Amen.”

And when she had completed the prayer, the whole fire was extinguished in such a way that not even any mild heat of the blaze remained. Then Aspasius, deputy of the city of Rome, unable to withstand the people’s unrest, ordered a sword to be plunged into her throat.

And so by this death, Christ consecrated her, steeped in the rosy blush of her own blood, as his spouse and martyr. In fact, her parents, having no sadness at all, carried off her body with every joy and buried it on their own small estate, not far from the city, on the road called the Numentine. When the entire throng of Christians assembled there, they were ambushed by the pagans; and, seeing an armed crowd of infidels coming upon them, all of them fled. Some, nevertheless, escaped after being injured by the impact of stones.

Octave—Lesson One

When, therefore, the parents of Blessed Agnes were keeping watch with constant, night-long vigils at her grave, within the midnight silence they saw a crowd of virgins, all dressed in robes of state woven with gold, who were passing by to the accompaniment of a great light; among whom they saw the most Blessed Agnes gleaming in a similar garment, and standing at her right hand, a lamb whiter than snow. Accordingly, while her parents, and some persons who were there at the same time, were watching these things, they more or less fell into a mental stupor.

But Blessed Agnes asked the holy virgins to stop for a short time, and as she stood, said to her parents: “Take care not to mourn for me as if I were dead: but rejoice with me, and congratulate me, because with all these [virgins] I have received a shining throne, and in heaven have been united with him whom I loved with complete concentration of heart while I was placed on earth.” And with these words, she passed on her way.

This vision was spread daily by all who had seen it.

Octave—Lesson Two

As a result, it happened that, after many years, this event was described by those who had seen it to Constantia, daughter of Constantine the

Augustus. For Constantia was herself a queen, a most prudent virgin, but had been so beset by wounds that from her head to her feet no part of her limbs had remained free [of them].

But having accepted the advice, in hope of recovering her health, she came by night to the martyr's grave; and although she was a pagan, nonetheless she poured out prayers with confiding attentiveness of heart.

While she was doing this, she was overcome, by the sudden sweetness of sleep, and saw in a vision the most blessed Agnes, extending to her admonitions of this kind: "Act with constancy, Constantia, and believe the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to be your savior, through whom you will now obtain the healing of all the wounds which you suffer upon your body." At this utterance, Constantia awoke in good health, so that no sign of any wound remained on her limbs.

Having returned to the imperial residence in the best possible health, therefore, she brought joy to her father the Augustus, and to her brothers the emperors. The whole city was decked in garlands; the soldiers rejoiced, and the private citizens, and indeed, all who heard these things.

Octave—Lesson Three

The infidelity of the nations was confounded, and the Lord's faith rejoiced.

In the meantime, she asked her father and imperial brothers that a basilica of Blessed Agnes be constructed, and ordered her mausoleum to be placed there. This report spread quickly to all, and as many as believed and came to her grave were healed, no matter with what infirmity they had been held captive, which no one should doubt that Christ continues to do right up to the present day.

Moreover, Constantia, the daughter of Constantine the Augustus, persevered in virginity: through her, many virgins, of middle-rank, the nobility, and the distinguished, took sacred veils.

And because faith does not suffer the losses of death, right up to the present day many Roman virgins attend the most blessed Agnes as if she remained present in body; and challenged by her example, manfully persevere uncorrupted, believing without doubt that by persevering they will obtain the palm of perpetual victory.

These things that I, Ambrose, the servant of Christ, have found written on hidden papyrus rolls, I have not allowed to be buried in

unproductive silence. Accordingly, to the honor of so great a martyr, I have written down her deeds as I have come to know them. I thought that the account of her passion had been destined for your imitation, oh virgins of Christ, and I pray to the Holy Spirit that our labors find fruit before the Lord in the similarity of your lives. Amen.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CLARE'S *FORMA VITAE*: UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS

The *forma vitae* of the Order of Poor Sisters¹ is the first example of canonically approved monastic legislation written by women and formed by the experience of women. As such, it is a significant contribution not only to Franciscan literature but to the literature of Christian spirituality. Clare's *forma vitae* was composed at the end of Clare's long monastic journey and is, therefore, the product not of idealistic vision, but of lived experience. It expresses Clare's vision of religious life, and represents the end of a determined struggle to obtain juridical approval for her *forma vitae*.² It is a text written not only by a foundress but by a community, even perhaps a small network of communities, committed to the "privilege of poverty," exemplary religious living, and the charitable care and concern for the poor surrounding the monasteries.³

¹ Clare called her community the "Order of Poor Sisters," rather than "Sisters Minor"—a title that would have better paralleled the "Friars Minor." In 1241, Pope Gregory IX in his December 21, 1241, letter, *Ad audientiam nostrum*, railed against women who were running around outside their monasteries and calling themselves "Sisters Minor." Gregory assured bishops that these women were not from the Order of S. Damian as the sisters in this Order were enclosed. *BF* I: 290. See Marco Bartoli, "La minorità in Chiara d'Assisi," in *Minores et subditi omnibus: Trattati caratterizzanti dell'identità francescana*, ed. Luigi Padovese, 205–16 (Rome: Edizioni Collegio S. Lorenzo da Brindisi-Laurentianum, 2003); Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Sorores Minores e autorità ecclesiastica fino al pontificato di Urbano IV," in *Chiara e la diffusione delle Clarisse nel secolo XIII*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Benedetto Vetere, 163–94 (Galatina: Congedo, 1998); and Optatus van Asseldonk, "Sorores Minores: Una nuova impostazione del problema," *CF* 62 (1992): 595–634.

² On this topic see Livarius Oligier, "De origine regularum ordinis S. Clarae," *AfH* 5 (1912): 181–209; 413–47; Alfonso Marini, "Ancilla Christi, plantula Sancti Francisci: Gli scritti di Santa Chiara e la regola," in *Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 107–56 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993); Ignacio Omaechevarría, "La 'regla' y las reglas de la orden de Santa Clara," *CF* 46 (1976), 93–119; Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

³ We know, for instance, that Agnes of Prague had sent a *forma vitae* to Rome that contained chapters from a "Rule of the Order of Blessed Damian" for approval. On May 11, 1238, Pope Gregory IX referred to the existence of this Rule in his response to Agnes, *Angelis Gaudium BF* I:242–44: "You previously sent us a particular note through our beloved son, the prior of the Hospital of S. Francis in Prague, a man that

While Clare's *forma vitae* is a synthetic text adapting various documents that preceded it,⁴ Clare's weaving together of her sources with her own original text creates legislation that is truly feminine in character. To discover Clare's unique contributions, it is important to discern what she selected from various sources and what was written in her own voice. Clare's text borrows not only from the approved Franciscan Rule of the brothers,⁵ but also other legislation given to Ugolinian sisters over the course of more than thirty years by various ecclesiastical authorities. What is unique about Clare's *forma vitae* is the freedom with which Clare uses these sources, editing them, moving from one to another, and abandoning them altogether when her own insights better served the text. In the end, Clare's monastic community would prove to be unique in its insistence to remain without an endowment, in its relationship with Franciscan brothers, and in its monastic spirituality.

What follows is an introduction to the unique contribution of the *forma vitae* of S. Clare. For those wishing to follow this essay with a textual analysis, the most comprehensive synthesis to date is the work of the Federazione S. Chiara di Assisi of the Poor Clares of Umbria-Sardegna who has published three volumes on Clare's *forma vitae*. The first volume mentioned above outlines in chart form the various sources used in Clare's *forma vitae*; the second, its evolutionary history;⁶ and the third, a chapter-by-chapter commentary on the *forma vitae* itself.⁷

Historically there are numerous sources that one would expect to find within Clare's *forma vitae* including the 1221 and 1223 Rules

we take care to confirm with apostolic authority, the plan that was presented to us through that man under the sign of your seal and has been created out of the above-mentioned formula and certain chapters that are contained in the Rule of the Order of Blessed Damian."

⁴ This can be seen clearly in the charting of Clare's *forma vitae* with the Rule of S. Benedict, the *forma vitae* of Ugolino, the 1221 and 1223 Rules of the Friars Minor, and the *forma vitae* of Innocent IV. Such an exegetical analysis has been published by the Federazione S. Chiara di Assisi delle Clarisse di Umbria-Sardegna, *Chiara di Assisi e le sue fonti legislative: Sinossi cromatica* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2003). See also Jean-François Godet-Calogeras, "Progetto evangelico di Chiara oggi," *Vita Minorum* 3 (1985): 198–301.

⁵ See Engelbert Grau, "Die Regel der hl. Klara (1253) in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der Regel der Minderbrüder (1223)," *FranzStud* 35 (1953): 211–73.

⁶ *Chiara di Assisi: Una vita prende forma—Iter storico* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2005).

⁷ *Il Vangelo come forma di vita: In ascolto di Chiara nella sua regola* (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 2007).

of the Friars Minor, the *forma vitae* of Ugolino,⁸ the *forma vitae* of Innocent IV, and the Rule of S. Benedict.⁹ In addition, the Clares of Umbria-Sardegna also studied and noted places of convergence with such sources as the Rule of S. Augustine, the Rule for the Virgins of Cesario di Arles, the constitutions of the Canon Regulars of the Order of Arrouaise, the constitutions of the Sisters of the Monastery of S. Dominic of Monte-Argi, Francis of Assisi's Rule for Hermitages,¹⁰ the institutions of the Order of Nuns of S. Sixto in Rome, *2Celano*, the *Memoriale Propositi* for Franciscan lay penitents, the Rule of the Order of the Brothers of the Holy Trinity, and the Rule of Grandmont. Obviously this was tedious and difficult work, and our knowledge and understanding of Clare's *forma vitae* is changed and deepened by this monumental synopsis.

In my own work, I have outlined Clare's *forma vitae* in relationship to the friars' 1223 Rule, Ugolino's *forma vitae*, and Innocent's *forma vitae*. While the publications of the Federazione S. Chiara di Assisi focused on Clare's *forma vitae* and outlined comparable texts, my analysis juxtaposed the above texts without immediate reference to Clare's *forma vitae*. The advantage of the Italian outline is that it precisely pinpoints issues within Clare's text; my outline, which I will not reproduce here because of its bulk and the need to place it on newsprint in order to preserve its picturesque immediacy, is helpful in that it demonstrates what is important to various consistencies. One can immediately see, for instance, in looking at the issue of poverty that Clare's text is not only passionate and autobiographical, but is also two-three times longer in comparison with papal texts and the Rule of 1223. Conversely, when speaking of the visitor, chaplain, and cardinal protector, Clare completes her commentary in one-third the space of Innocent IV and half the space of Ugolino. Because of the unique perspectives of these approaches, I will use both outlines in the following reflections on the uniqueness of Clare's *forma vitae*.

Before beginning, special attention must be given to the role that Francis played in the founding of Clare's monastic life. In the first

⁸ Ignazio Omaechevarria, ed., *Escritos de santa Clara y documentos contemporaneos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1970), 210–232; and Giovanni Boccali, "La *cum omnis vero religio* del cardinale Ugolino: *Forma Vite* primitiva per San Damiano ed altri monasteri," *Frate Francesco* 74 (2008): 435–77.

⁹ See Henri de Saint-Marie, "Présence de la Règle Bénédictine dans la Règle de sainte Claire," *AFH* 82 (1989): 3–20.

¹⁰ See Martino Conti, "La regola per gli eremi di san Francesco e la regola di santa Chiara," *Forma Sororum* 23 (1986): 246–53.

chapter of her *forma vitae*, Clare credited the founding of her Order to Francis¹¹—we have seen in previous chapters how Gregory IX had wanted to usurp this distinction.¹² Shortly afterwards, in the same chapter, Clare referred to herself as the “unworthy handmaid of Christ and little plant of the most blessed father, Francis.”¹³ Placing herself within the Franciscan community, Clare reminded her sisters that she began by placing her obedience in the hands of Francis and his successors, and that they, in turn, were obligated to obey the successors of Francis.

Francis’s name, in fact, appears in every third chapter of Clare’s *forma vitae*. In chapter three, the sisters are told that they may receive communion on various days including the Feast of S. Francis.¹⁴ In chapter six, the focal point of the *forma vitae*, Clare offered evidence that Francis was the founder of her monastic way of life since it was Francis’s example and teaching that opened her heart to do penance.¹⁵ It was also Francis who tested the resolve of Clare and the first sisters, and who gave them a *forma vitae*.¹⁶ It was Francis who advised her never to turn away from poverty and, in fact, Clare asserted that she and her sisters had never turned away from the poverty¹⁷ that they had promised God and Blessed Francis.¹⁸ Finally, in chapter twelve, Clare stated that her monastery “out of consideration for the compassion of God and Blessed Francis”¹⁹ had always had a chaplain from the Order of Friars Minor.²⁰ From the beginning until the end of her *forma vitae*, Clare is not only clear, but adamant, that Francis is the founder and inspiration of her *forma vitae*.

¹¹ *FLCI* 1:1.

¹² Already in 1229, in Thomas of Celano’s *Life of S. Francis* commissioned by Pope Gregory IX, credit for the regulation of S. Damiano was given to Pope Gregory IX: “Their wondrous life and their renowned practices received from the Lord Pope Gregory who had been bishop of Ostia at that time, would require another book and the leisure in which to write it.” *IC* 20.

¹³ *FLCI* 1:3.

¹⁴ *FLCI* 3:14.

¹⁵ *FLCI* 6:1.

¹⁶ *FLCI* 6:2.

¹⁷ *FLCI* 6:9.

¹⁸ *FLCI* 6:10.

¹⁹ *FLCI* 12:7.

²⁰ *FLCI* 12:5.

CHAPTER ONE

When one compares the introductory text of Clare's *forma vitae* with that of Cardinal Ugolino's and Innocent IV's legislation, one immediately notices its clarity and brevity. Adapting the style of the Rule of 1223 to state her objective precisely, Clare avoids the juridical tone of previous papal canonists and presents her text simply as the "*forma vitae* of the Order of Poor Sisters."²¹ Her choice of the title of her community, although simple, is politically charged. As it was in so many canonical letters naming various monasteries of the Ugolinian Order, enclosure is not mentioned. Rather poverty, Clare insisted, was the distinctive charism of the Order. Clare uses the term "sisters" rather than "ladies" or "nuns," preferring a relational term that better described the care and concern that the sisters had for each other within the S. Damiano monastery. As we have seen above, this "Order of Poor Sisters" was "founded by Blessed Francis," and therefore all claims that it was founded by a papal jurist were rendered moot.

The essence of the life of the sisters is taken straight out of the text of the friars' 1223 Rule, "To observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without property, and in chastity."²² When beginning their legislation, Ugolino and Innocent stated that every religious institute must have rules and requirements. For Clare, there was only one requirement—"the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Monastic vows were a response to the gospel, not to canonical directives.

Regarding Clare's obedience, Clare reiterates that she is the "unworthy handmaid of Christ and little plant of the most blessed father, Francis,"²³ and yet, she first promises obedience, not to Francis and his successors, but to Pope Innocent, his successors, and to the Roman church.²⁴ In doing this, Clare placed her monastery directly under Rome, therefore requiring the services of a cardinal protector just as the friars. At the same time, Clare's charismatic obedience, if one might define it in this way, was to Francis: "Just as at the beginning of her conversion, she, together with her sisters, promised obedience to

²¹ *FLCI* 1:1.

²² *FLCI* 1:2; *LR* 1:1.

²³ *FLCI* 1:3.

²⁴ *FLCI* 1:3.

Blessed Francis, so now, she promises his successors to observe inviolably this same obedience.”²⁵

All necessary needs, petitions to the Holy See, or issues arising in the normal course of life would be taken care of either through the friars or through the cardinal protector of the Franciscans. The sisters in the monastery would obey their abbess: “the other sisters shall always be obligated to obey the successor of Blessed Francis, Sister Clare, and the other canonically elected abbesses who succeed her.”²⁶ Because religious women were not clerics with their rights in canon law clearly defined, Clare’s approach is brilliant. If a minister general worked against Clare’s community, the community could, without disobeying its *forma vitae*, appeal to Rome. If a pope legislated against the interests of the monastery, the sisters could appeal to the Franciscan minister general to intercede. In this way the sisters, who had no juridical power of their own, could legitimately negotiate their well-being.

Clare wanted to preserve the simple, original innocence of her beginning. While Francis had promised his care and concern for the sisters, Clare understood from the beginning that the brothers would not be able to supply every temporal need. She expected only that they would care for the pastoral needs of the S. Damiano monastery and share temporal goods as they were able. Yet, while Clare promised obedience to the minister general of the Friars Minor, there was nothing in the friars’ legislation that obligated them to the sisters’ service. From Clare’s point of view, obedience to the friars was her *forma vitae*. From the friars’ point of view, the obligation of care and concern for the sisters was done only when mandated by the apostolic see.²⁷

Clare referred to her text as a “*forma vitae*,” not a rule. This differs from the Rule of 1223, which stated clearly that it was a rule: “The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this.”²⁸ While the Rule of 1223, is extensively referenced in Clare’s text, an agreement to incorporate the sisters into the Order of Friars Minor had never been negotiated.²⁹

²⁵ *FLCI* 1:4.

²⁶ *FLCI* 1:5.

²⁷ *LR* 11:1–2.

²⁸ *LR* 1:1.

²⁹ On the question of the incorporation of thirteenth-century women’s monasteries into male communities, and of Clare’s monastery in particular, see Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 89–137. Also helpful concerning the question of incorporation is

The sisters of S. Damiano were not under obedience to the minister general, but were to remain an independent female community under their abbess.

Thus, already in the first chapter of Clare's *forma vitae*, we hear Clare's unique voice. She confirmed that her way of life was instituted by Francis, described herself as being the little plant of Francis, vowed to be obedient to the successors of Francis, and obliged the abbesses and sisters who succeeded her to this same obedience. Clare, who lacked a formal juridical tie to the Order of Friars Minor, was attempting to negotiate a relationship with the friars and the Roman church that would bind the sisters to the Franciscan friars, but at the same time keep the independence the sisters had to establish new monasteries and accept new recruits—freedoms that they had as a monastery under the auspices of the Holy See.

CHAPTER TWO

Clare's second chapter outlines the procedures followed at S. Damiano for the reception of new women into the monastery. A woman came to the monastery "by divine inspiration,"³⁰ paralleling the promise Francis made to Clare and the earliest sisters that began with the phrase, "because of divine inspiration."³¹ Entrance into S. Damiano was the beginning of a love affair with the Holy Spirit, not merely a juridical state of life. In this, Clare's text closely parallels the Rule of 1221, with important differences needed to adopt Francis's prescriptions to the monastic life.

A woman comes to the monastery by divine inspiration "wanting to accept this life."³² S. Damiano accepted only women who desired the particular style of life followed in Clare's monastery. Their choice needed to be their own, and it needed to be a free choice. While the

Brigitte Degler-Spengler, "The Incorporation of Cistercian Nuns into the Order in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century," trans. Gabriele Hahn, in *Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 3, *Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, 85–134 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995).

³⁰ *FLCI* 2:1. Concerning a woman's motivations for entering a medieval monastery that might have been other than "divine" see Penelope Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 27–34.

³¹ *FLCI* 6:1.

³² *FLCI* 2:1.

friars were obliged in the Rule of 1221 to present a candidate to their provincial minister as soon as they were able,³³ the abbess, in Clare's *forma vitae*, needed the consent of all the sisters before a candidate was admitted into the community.³⁴ Only if the majority of the sisters agreed, could the abbess ask permission from the Cardinal Protector to receive her.³⁵ Obviously the confines of an enclosed monastic life necessitated harmony and agreement among the sisters. Nothing can potentially disrupt community life more than a choice for its future, i.e., those who were entering the community. Knowing this, Clare sought the permission of the sisters for each entrant. Once this was obtained, the cardinal protector, whose interest in S. Damiano would probably rest in the number of sisters the community could support and in the reputation of the monastery, would grant permission for entrance.

When the decision was made to accept a woman, it was the role of the abbess to examine the candidate concerning the Catholic faith and sacraments of the church or to appoint someone to do this.³⁶ Before a woman entered S. Damiano, it was necessary that the community be assured that her theology and sacramental practice were consistent with the community's faith and practice. If the woman was educable, it seems that this process could take as long as necessary; if not, the woman was not accepted for entrance. In addition, it was necessary to inquire whether or not she was canonically free to enter monastic life.³⁷ If she had never been married, or if she had been married but her husband, with the authority of his diocesan bishop, had already entered into religious life and had made a vow of continence—had completed his probationary year³⁸—then the woman was judged to be free. In addition, the strenuous form of monastic life practiced at S. Damiano made advanced age, illness, or mental instability impediments to entering this life.³⁹ It was one thing for the sisters living at

³³ ER 2:2.

³⁴ FLCl 2:2.

³⁵ FLCl 2:2.

³⁶ FLCl 2:3.

³⁷ FLCl 2:5.

³⁸ In response to various scandals arising in the Franciscan brotherhood that did little in its beginning fervor to vet candidates to the fraternity, Pope Honorius III in the 1220 bull, *Cum secundum*, mandated the "year of probation" for all candidates to the Franciscan Order. BF I:6.

³⁹ FLCl 2:5.

S. Damiano to take care of the sisters who had become old or ill in their midst. Theirs was a monastery, not a hospital, and their way of life demanded reasonable good health and youth from those entering.

By refusing the acceptance of the old and the ill, S. Damiano was also deflecting the impetus of women who wished to spend their last days in monastic seclusion in return for providing economic benefits to the monastery. A deathbed entrance insured that a woman was cared for in a monastic infirmary, obtained the blessed habit before death, benefitted from the perpetual prayer of the nuns, and had access to the monastic cemetery. Although monasteries carefully negotiated settlements from this type of benefactor, these economic contracts were often litigated later by relatives or local clerics who found themselves cut out of benefices they felt were rightfully theirs.⁴⁰

If a candidate was entering under divine inspiration, freely desired this life, was Catholic in faith and practice, proved to be canonically free, and was young and healthy enough to engage the rigors of the S. Damiano lifestyle, then the manner of the S. Damiano life was to be carefully explained to her.⁴¹ It is in this explanation of the "manner of life" that the true formation of the candidate began. Until this point, the candidate has merely been interviewed. This initial formation of the candidate, however, required a considerable commitment of the community in terms of time and affection toward a candidate. It was necessary for her to understand the elements of monastic life in general and of the style of life particular to S. Damiano.

If she seemed suitable to the monastic life, Clare states that the "word of the holy gospel is to be explained to her: that she should go and sell everything she has and make certain that the money is distributed to the poor."⁴² The candidate must be clear that her decision to enter the Monastery of S. Damiano is a choice to embrace the Poor Christ. Again we see that Matthew 19:21 is at the heart of the Franciscan vocation as this same biblical message was outlined in the Rule of 1223 for the initiation of the Franciscan brothers.⁴³ A woman entering S. Damiano who had sold all her goods would no longer have her patrimony should she decide to return to secular life, nor would she

⁴⁰ On this topic see Joseph Lynch, *Simoniackal Entry into Religious Life from 1000–1260* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1976).

⁴¹ *FLCl* 2:6.

⁴² *FLCl* 2:7.

⁴³ *LR* 2:5.

have her dowry intact should she hope to transfer to another monastery. Supporting herself without a patron and with respect to Christian moral principles would be difficult, if not impossible. About her only option, if she left S. Damiano, would be to join a penitential monastery that did not demand a dowry from its entrants. The giving of one's goods to the poor was a weighty choice—a choice that made Clare's monastic vocation unique.

Obviously giving away everything before having any experience of life within the monastery was a drastic step. Some women might prefer to try the life out first, others, especially if they were named in wills or benefices of some kind, would not immediately have access to these resources. Discernment was needed in each case, and Clare, like Francis before her,⁴⁴ noted that if a candidate was unable to give everything away immediately, her good will was sufficient.⁴⁵ While poverty was central to life at S. Damiano, rigid adherence, even to what Clare says is “the one thing necessary,”⁴⁶ never trumped the love of an individual soul. Clare knew from experience that discerning a vocation to her monastery was a privileged, personal, tender, and sacred experience. If a candidate came “by divine inspiration,” her vocation must be discerned with the utmost reverence.

Exactly how a candidate sold her possessions, however, and gave the money she received to the poor was not to be the concern of either the Franciscan brothers or the sisters of S. Damiano. Rather than having favorite causes, the abbess and her sisters were “not to concern themselves with her temporal affairs, so that she is free to distribute her goods as the Lord inspires.”⁴⁷ If she needed counsel concerning her temporal matters, however, the sisters could send her to discerning and God-fearing men who could provide her with prudent advice.⁴⁸ Using the brothers' Rule of 1223, as a guide, Clare adds the word “discerning.” Obviously it was important that those helping the candidate were not only pious but “discerning” as well.⁴⁹ They needed to help

⁴⁴ *ER* 2:11 and *LR* 2:6.

⁴⁵ *FLCI* 2:8.

⁴⁶ *2LAg* 10. Clare's allusion, of course, is to Luke 10:42: “Unum est necessarium.”

⁴⁷ *FLCI* 2:9. This directive was lifted with necessary gender alterations from the *LR* 2:7.

⁴⁸ *FLCI* 2:10.

⁴⁹ Clare understood the necessity of discretion/discernment and used the word frequently in her writings. See Optatus van Asseldonk, “Chiara, donna di divina discrezione Cristiana,” *L'Italia Francescana* 62 (1987): 485–94.

her spend the money wisely and in a manner that did not in any way injure the reputation of the woman donor.

While Franciscan women obviously did improve the lives of the poor surrounding their monasteries in that their resources were given directly to the poor, Clare was clear that there were no organized projects that were sponsored or even encouraged by her monastery. Religious life at S. Damiano, while having social implications, was not a social program.⁵⁰ A woman could do with her goods whatever seemed best to her without interference from the sisters. This ability for entrants to do with their money as they wished, offered a variety of poor people resources, and protected the integrity of the monastery.

It was at her clothing—including the tonsure and the setting aside of her secular clothes for three tunics and a mantle⁵¹—that signaled a woman's formal entrance into the monastery. Tonsure and the setting aside of secular dress was the quasi-liturgical sign of the penitential vocation.⁵² The cutting of a young girl's hair signaled that she was unmarriageable and removed from secular life. It also, no doubt, helped many a young woman survive the inevitable cultural shock of entering a monastery, preventing her from contemplating an abrupt and immediate departure simply because she was overwhelmed. No matter how well a woman was prepared, the lived reality of monastic life was no doubt a considerable adjustment. The time of the novitiate year was necessary to bridge the gap between the secular and religious.

Once the woman had entered, Clare stated that she could not leave the monastery without "a useful, reasonable, obvious, and approved purpose."⁵³ While this seems restrictive, it leaves the reason for exit to discretion. Previous papal rules did not do this. The Ugolinian *forma vitae* recognized only one reason for leaving the monastery—to found another monastery. Innocent IV's *forma vitae* permitted sisters to

⁵⁰ Regarding Clare's influence in her local environs see Giovanna Casagrande, "Presenza di Chiara in Umbria nei secoli XIII–XIV: Spunti e appunti," *CF* 62 (1992): 481–505.

⁵¹ *FLCl* 2:11. Concerning Clare's monastic dress see Cordelia Warr, "Religious Dress in Italy in the Late Middle Ages," in *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning and Identity*, ed. Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson, 79–92 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁵² See Luigi Padovese, "La tonsura di Chiara: Gesto di consacrazione o segno di penitenza?" *Laurentianum* 31 (1990): 389–404.

⁵³ *FLCl* 2:12.

leave to reform, govern, or correct another monastery. Clare purposefully omits any specific reason; leaving the monastery is a matter of discretion.

At the end of her novitiate year, a candidate “may be received into obedience promising to observe perpetually the life and form of our poverty.”⁵⁴ It is clear from this formulation that Clare understood the uniqueness of the S. Damiano monastery to be the poverty of living without endowments. A woman was not simply entering monastic life, but was entering the Franciscan monastic life of S. Damiano. The object of her profession is not to “observe this life and Rule”⁵⁵ as in the brother’s Rule of 1223, but to “observe perpetually the life and form of our poverty.” For Clare, poverty was “the one thing necessary.”

The veil proper to the Order was the sign of profession and was not to be given to those still in the novitiate.⁵⁶ Clare does not state how novices were to cover their heads. They may have worn white instead of black veils, or perhaps another type of head covering. Small mantles⁵⁷ are permitted for convenience and propriety, and the abbess was obliged to provide prudently for her sisters “according to individual needs, locations, seasons, and cold climates.”⁵⁸ While Clare’s sisters were not traveling friars, this text that Clare adapted from the Rule of 1223⁵⁹ of the friars was essential. Certainly, for instance, the sisters in Prague would require more substantial clothing than those at S. Damiano. The provision that an abbess might provide prudently according to locations and cold climates—this addition of the use of the abbess’s discretion is again unique to Clare’s text—substantiates the opinion that Clare and her sisters were well aware that Clare’s *forma vitae* would be adopted not only by S. Damiano, but also by other monasteries of women who had requested and persevered in the “privilege of poverty.”

Directions inserted into Clare’s *forma vitae* regarding young girls received into the monastery before the legal age are unique to Clare.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ *FLCI* 2:13.

⁵⁵ *LR* 2:11.

⁵⁶ *FLCI* 2:14.

⁵⁷ *FLCI* 2:15.

⁵⁸ *FLCI* 2:16.

⁵⁹ *LR* 4:2.

⁶⁰ *FLCI* 2:17–20. Concerning medieval canon law regarding the acceptance and subsequent profession of child oblates in women’s monasteries see René Metz, “*Le statut de la femme en droit canonique medieval*,” in *La Femme*, 59–113 (Brussels:

We do not have much evidence regarding the identity of these girls. It is clear that they did not attend a boarding school at the S. Damiano monastery, but rather lived there being educated in "a holy manner of life and virtuous character."⁶¹ Perhaps some of these children were orphans, girls without a dowry, or waifs whose virtue was threatened by the extreme poverty or illness of their parents. When they reached a legal age, Clare, like S. Benedict before her, does not consider that they might choose a secular life. As a marriage partner would be chosen for a girl by her father, so also a permanent vocation to the religious life could be chosen for a daughter by her parents.⁶² Some of these girls may not have had the necessary dowry and family ties to make a marriage contract possible. In any case, the abbess was to select a "teacher from the more prudent sisters of the entire monastery"⁶³ for the religious education of these girls and the other novices.⁶⁴ Formation demanded the very best resources of the monastery, not the leftovers.

The sisters who were to serve outside the monastery were to be discerned with the same rigors of examination and formation as those who were enclosed.⁶⁵ The difference between the two groups of sisters was not status, but vocation. A sister was called either to be entirely enclosed, or to serve the community on the outside at times for "a useful, reasonable, obvious, and approved purpose."⁶⁶ Because all appropriate medieval women covered their feet, these sisters, when traveling outside the monastery, were to wear shoes.⁶⁷

Clare was clear that S. Damiano was not to be used as a retirement home, a women's shelter, or a seasonal hotel for pious women: "No other woman may live with us in the monastery unless she has been

Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin, 1962). Concerning the medieval practice of accepting young girls into monasteries see Penelope Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 18–27.

⁶¹ *FLCI* 2:20.

⁶² Joseph Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry into Religious Life from 1000–1260* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 36–60.

⁶³ *FLCI* 2:19.

⁶⁴ See Bert Roest, "Education and Religious Formation in the Medieval Order of Poor Clares: Some Preliminary Observations," *CF* 73 (2003): 47–73; Lezlie Knox, "Clare of Assisi and Learning: A Foundation for Intellectual Life within the Franciscan Second Order," *The Cord* 46 (1996): 171–79.

⁶⁵ *FLCI* 2:21.

⁶⁶ *FLCI* 2:12.

⁶⁷ *FLCI* 2:22.

received according to the form of our profession.”⁶⁸ The boundary of the monastery was not the stone monastic wall, but Franciscan poverty. By mandating that all who lived in the monastery accept the austere poverty of S. Damiano, Clare avoided the problem of being forced to take in wealthy women, who in many cases would prefer familial gifts and favors over monastic austerities.

The preaching of this poverty to a new candidate began with the Christmas mystery: “And out of love for the most holy and beloved baby boy wrapped in poor rags and laid in a manger, and for the love of his Most Holy Mother, I admonish, beg, and exhort my sisters always to wear clothing of little worth.”⁶⁹ Clare’s allusion to “the baby boy wrapped in poor rags and laid in a manger,” of course, would have reminded the sisters under Clare’s guidance of the entire mystery of Christ’s poverty. He is a poor babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, the poor man teaching during his public life, the vilified one lamenting on the cross, and the glorified Christ who embraces those who have followed him in poverty in the fullness of eschatological vision.⁷⁰ In giving away all one has to the poor, and in wearing poor clothing, a woman became like the one she loved. Embracing the poorest of clothes becomes for Clare the embrace of Christ himself.

CHAPTER THREE

Chapter three of Clare’s *forma vitae* concerns monastic prayer, communal fasting, and the sacramental life of the monastery. While one might see that Clare has been influenced by various sources, in particular, the friars’ Rule of 1223, The Rule of S. Benedict, and the *forma vitae* of Innocent IV, when describing common prayer in the S. Damiano monastery, the way in which Clare weaves together and deviates from these various sources is interesting. The sisters who were literate were not to say the Office as other monastics, with stylized and melismatic singing that required time and practice and further divided the literate from the illiterate, but were simply to read the Divine Office as did the itinerant Friars Minor.⁷¹ Reciting the Office, rather than sing-

⁶⁸ *FLCI* 2:23.

⁶⁹ *FLCI* 2:24.

⁷⁰ *4LAG* 11–32.

⁷¹ *FLCI* 3:1–2.

ing it, was a practice that distinguished Clare's sisters as a community of penitents. Rather than having expensive monastic texts for prayer, the sisters of S. Damiano were permitted to have breviaries like the friars who followed the Roman Rite.⁷² In the case of a literate sister, who for a good reason was unable to be present during communal prayer, Clare had her say the Our Fathers as prescribed for the illiterate sisters.⁷³

Regarding the prayer for the illiterate sisters, Clare copied the instructions for the number of Our Fathers for Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline from the 1223 Rule of the Friars Minor,⁷⁴ and added the Franciscan custom from the friars' Rule of 1221 of praying seven Our Fathers at Vespers for the dead with the *Requiem aeternam*.⁷⁵ In addition to the prayers at Vespers for the dead, Clare added twelve Our Fathers for this same purpose at Matins for the sisters who could not read.⁷⁶ Those who were literate were to recite the Office of the Dead at Matins—a custom that Clare's *forma vitae* alone mentions.⁷⁷ When a sister of the monastery died, all the sisters prayed together fifty Our Fathers.⁷⁸

What is unique about Clare's description of the common prayer at S. Damiano is its inclusivity. Since Clare followed the brother's Rule in designing her form of prayer, the brothers, who lived at the monastery, were able to recite the Office with the sisters. They were not silent in the audience of the main church while the sisters vocalized behind the grill, but actively prayed. Clare's directives would have permitted the possibility of responsorial prayer in which the brothers recited one verse of a psalm, for instance, and the sisters the next. Sisters who needed to be outside the monastery, who were occupied in the infirmary, or who were absent from the choir for some reason, prayed the Our Fathers just as the sisters who were unable to read. Because the literate sisters were not practicing endless hours on melismatic flourishes, but were simply "saying" the Office, there was not such an obvious difference within the monastery between those who could read and those who were illiterate. Both merely prayed as they were

⁷² *FLCI* 3:2.

⁷³ *FLCI* 3:3.

⁷⁴ *LR* 3:3.

⁷⁵ *FLCI* 3:5 and *ER* 3:10.

⁷⁶ *FLCI* 3:5.

⁷⁷ *FLCI* 3:6.

⁷⁸ *FLCI* 3:7.

able, and then went on with their lives together in the S. Damiano monastery.

Regarding fasting, Clare's *forma vitae* is clear. Because of the "privilege of poverty" the sisters did not have a regular income with which they might have certain food items at set times. Because of this, the sisters fasted always with the exception of Christmas day when they were able to eat twice.⁷⁹ This kind of penitential fasting, rather than regular monastic fasting, was unique to the S. Damiano monastery precisely because of the "privilege of poverty."⁸⁰ For the truly poor, fasting was not a choice, but a necessity. The abbess could use her discretion, however, to dispense the young, frail, and the sisters serving outside the monastery.⁸¹ During a time of famine or other obvious need, the canonical principle was held: "necessity knows no law."⁸²

With the permission of their abbess, the sisters could confess at least twelve times a year.⁸³ This clerical service, of course, insured that the friars living at Clare's monastery were engaged in useful work. It also placed, at the level of law, the need of the sisters to have access to sacramental services—something that the Ugolino's and Innocent's legislation never prescribed. While the Rule of 1221, advised that the brothers "confess to priests of our Religion,"⁸⁴ Clare interestingly omitted this and replaced it instead with the prescription of "twelve times a year." Although the sisters were only to engage in conversation that pertained to confession and the salvation of souls,⁸⁵ these confessions took on the character not only of the confession of sins but also of spiritual direction.

In a medieval world that permitted only the infrequent reception of communion, Clare's sisters were permitted to "receive communion

⁷⁹ *FLCI* 3:8–9.

⁸⁰ For more information on the fasting of Clare and her sisters see Gerard Pieter Freeman, "Klarissenfasten im 13. Jahrhundert," *AFH* 87 (1994): 217–85. Concerning Agnes of Prague and her struggle to adopt S. Damiano fasting practices at the Prague monastery see Alfonso Marini, *Agnese di Boemia* (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1991), 81–83; 145–51; and Joan Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001), 221–32.

⁸¹ *FLCI* 3:10.

⁸² *FLCI* 3:11.

⁸³ *FLCI* 3:12. See Dyan Elliott, "Women and Confession: From Empowerment to Pathology," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, 31–51 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁸⁴ *ER* 20:1.

⁸⁵ *FLCI* 3:13.

seven times during the year namely on Christmas day, Holy Thursday, Easter, Pentecost, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the Feast of S. Francis, and the Feast of All Saints.”⁸⁶ For Clare, the reception of communion was not a monthly occurrence, but a liturgical event. That the sisters received communion twice in the space of three days and at other times, not within the space of two months was not important to Clare. For Clare, the reception of communion was not a temporal ritual, but was rather about the person of Christ and the liturgical celebration of Christian joys.

The sisters listened to the liturgy through a small window, meaning that they did not see the priest or the service.⁸⁷ This, of course, could make attendance at liturgy tedious and Clare, as well as Agnes of Prague, knew that for the good of the sisters’ souls, this tedium needed to be broken at times with visual celebration. After much politicking, the Damianite sisters received permission for the chaplain to enter the enclosure to celebrate the reception of the Eucharist either in the sisters’ choir with the healthy, or in the infirmary for the sick sisters.⁸⁸

CHAPTER FOUR

The fourth chapter of Clare’s *forma vitae* deals with governmental structure. The first topic, the election of the abbess, was a theoretical topic for the S. Damiano monastery as Clare had served as abbess since its foundation. The minister general or the provincial of the Order of Friars Minor was to be present for the election.⁸⁹ His role was to preach the Word of God in order to encourage the sisters “to perfect harmony and the common good in the choice they are to make.”⁹⁰

Since canonical form was to be followed,⁹¹ outside interests were not to have a role in the election. A monastery with the “privilege of poverty” was somewhat protected in that there was nothing of worth

⁸⁶ *FLCl* 3:14. See Caroline Walker Bynum, “Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century,” *Women’s Studies* 11 (1984): 179–214.

⁸⁷ Caroline Bruzelius, “Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture, c. 1213–1340,” in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance Hoffman Berman, 272–89 (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁸⁸ *FLCl* 3:15.

⁸⁹ *FLCl* 4:2.

⁹⁰ *FLCl* 4:3.

⁹¹ *FLCl* 4:1.

to fight over in the monastery. This might be changed, however, if someone was elected who was not professed. Clare expressly forbade this,⁹² but added that if it did happen that someone who was not professed was elected or imposed on the community, the sisters were to protest radically: “she is not to be obeyed unless she first professes the form of our poverty.”⁹³ Clare’s point was not that the woman had not professed monastic vows, but that she needed to “profess the form of our poverty.”

Normally, an election was held after the death of an abbess, but Clare, following the 1223 Rule of the brothers in which the same case is given,⁹⁴ described also another possibility. One cannot help but wonder if Clare had many times during her tenure as abbess given her own sisters permission to replace her, if the consensus was that she had become too ill to carry out this role. If an abbess was not capable “for service and their common good,” Clare stated, the sisters must “elect for themselves another as abbess and mother as soon as possible.”⁹⁵ It was not just about having a governmental head, but also about having a mother for the sisters. Someone needed to see to the needs of each sister in the monastery, as a mother would see to the needs of each of her children.

Clare proceeded with a pastoral reflection. The abbess, according to Clare, is a shepherd who must render an account of the flock entrusted to her care.⁹⁶ Becoming an abbess in Clare’s monastery was not a personal achievement, but a responsibility not only of service, but of the very souls of the sisters who are under her care. The abbess was not to lord it over her sisters but to inspire them by her virtue and holy manner of life. In this way “the sisters might obey her more out of love than out of fear.”⁹⁷ In particular, she should not favor one sister over another because of the scandal and division this behavior causes.⁹⁸

Clare’s description of the abbess was gleaned directly from the description of a minister general found in *2Celano*.⁹⁹ Celano described

⁹² *FLCI* 4:4.

⁹³ *FLCI* 4:5.

⁹⁴ *LR* 8:4.

⁹⁵ *FLCI* 4:7.

⁹⁶ *FLCI* 4:8.

⁹⁷ *FLCI* 4:9.

⁹⁸ *FLCI* 4:10.

⁹⁹ *2C* 184–86.

the ideal minister general as a father and Good Shepherd.¹⁰⁰ He should not have personal favorites and thus suffer the scandal that this favoritism invites.¹⁰¹ Like the minister general of Celano's description, Clare stated that it is the abbess's role to console and be the last refuge for the afflicted.¹⁰² She is to provide remedies for the sick so that they are not burdened by despair.¹⁰³ It was Clare's particular concern that the abbess would "keep the common life in all things especially in the church, dormitory, refectory, infirmary, and by her clothing."¹⁰⁴ She was not to eat alone, to eat food that the other sisters did not have, to enjoy private space apart from her sisters, or to wear clothing that signaled any special status. All the officials of the monastery, including the vicaress, were bound to these same directives.¹⁰⁵

Once a week, the abbess was to call her sisters together for a community chapter.¹⁰⁶ The sisters, including the abbess, began the chapter by confessing their common and public faults.¹⁰⁷ These faults and negligences were not their private sins, but the offenses that had affected the common good, the bonds of unity within the monastery, or even the use of the common resources of the monastery. Humbly coming before one's sisters asking for forgiveness for even the small things that had affected in some way the good of the community was a healing action both for the person as well as for the community.

After the community had been healed of any division, the abbess proceeded with monastic business. The topics of the chapter included anything that affected "the benefit and integrity of the monastery."¹⁰⁸ One might consider that in Clare's monastery, in particular, the very practical ways in which the sisters embraced their "privilege of poverty" was a frequent theme. Certainly any outside business deal, the procuring of resources such as material for tunics and cloaks, the needs of the sick—all these things would have been part of the conversation. It was the chapter that directly involved the sisters in the decision-making of the monastery. The abbess facilitated the discussion among sisters

¹⁰⁰ 2C 184.

¹⁰¹ 2C 185.

¹⁰² *FLCI* 4:11–12.

¹⁰³ *FLCI* 4:12.

¹⁰⁴ *FLCI* 4:13.

¹⁰⁵ *FLCI* 4:14.

¹⁰⁶ *FLCI* 4:15.

¹⁰⁷ *FLCI* 4:16.

¹⁰⁸ *FLCI* 4:17.

who valued their communion in Christ. Because loving concern rather than power and wealth was at the core of their discussion, consensus was the norm. Once the chapter was over, the sisters could peacefully live their week knowing that they had been listened to, and that the common good had been truly discerned. In this discussion, every voice mattered for, as Clare paraphrased the Rule of S. Benedict, “the Lord often reveals what is better to the least.”¹⁰⁹ What is discerned in the monastic chapter is not what is better or worse, or even what is best. Moral virtue is taken for granted. It was the small shades of goodness, that which was better, that was sought.

Community consensus, evident necessity, and the services of a procurator were required before the community could incur a large debt.¹¹⁰ Clare was careful to note that using the monastery as a safety deposit was never to be permitted.¹¹¹ Until the time of modern banks, monasteries and cathedrals were often used by the rich for storing gold, silver, money, jewels and other valuables through the purchase of gated family side chapels. While these churches became magnets for thieves, the very poverty of Clare’s monastery protected the sisters from plunderers. If there was wealth located within the walls of the monastery, the sisters would be at risk not only from evil-doers, but also from maligners.¹¹²

The common consent of the sisters was also needed when choosing those who were to hold various offices within the monastery. In order to “preserve the unity of mutual love and peace,” the sisters chose those among them who would hold various responsibilities.¹¹³ In addition, the sisters selected eight sisters from among the more discerning to advise the abbess concerning those matters pertinent to the *forma vitae* of the S. Damiano monastery.¹¹⁴ Since the *forma vitae* of the Monastery of S. Damiano was frequently a matter of prudence more than of law, the discreets worked with the abbess to discern various issues within the monastery. No doubt these cases might include such

¹⁰⁹ *FLCI* 4:18; *RB* 3:3. Concerning a longtime error regarding the transmission of the Latin text of this line from the Rule of S. Benedict see Chiara Agnese Acquadro, “Saepe enim dominus quod melius est *minori* revelat: Un errore di lettura ormai vecchio di cinque secoli,” *CF* 71 (2001): 521–26.

¹¹⁰ *FLCI* 4:19.

¹¹¹ *FLCI* 4:20.

¹¹² *FLCI* 4:21.

¹¹³ *FLCI* 4:22.

¹¹⁴ *FLCI* 4:23.

things as how to best care for the sick or mentally ill, how to deal with the transitional issues of candidates, or how best to propose solutions to the sisters regarding the physical needs of the monastery.

All this insured that the power of the abbess was balanced with the will and cooperation of the sisters. Again, since all officers presided over a paucity of resources rather than abundance, those holding office at S. Damiano obtained greater responsibility without receiving accompanying benefit. The roles were simply positions of service. What is more, any position that one might have within the monastery was never guaranteed since the sisters for no other reason other than it might seem "useful and expedient to them," could remove anyone in office, even the discreet, and elect others in their place.¹¹⁵ When poverty was the "one thing necessary," service in the monastery was simply whatever or whoever best worked for the souls of the sisters and the charitable peace within the monastery.

CHAPTER FIVE

The fifth chapter of Clare's *forma vitae* deals with the kind of silence kept by the sisters and, in this same spirit, offers guidelines for sisters who were given permission to communicate with those outside the monastery. From a monastic perspective, silence is the discipline necessary to create the solitude and peace needed for true communion with God. Although an ascetical discipline, it is also a welcome respite from the noise of those things that hold a soul back from union with God. While it is true that the initiate might find the discipline of silence burdensome, the one who is more mature in the monastic lifestyle embraces silence as the space for meeting God. When Clare spoke of silence, she was not only maintaining needed monastic discipline, but was fashioning a monastic ambience that invited peace, mutual charity, and true communion with God.

In this context, Clare began by affirming the discipline of the traditional monastic "grand silence." All, except those who are serving outside the monastery, or other sisters who were required for some reason to engage others—this, of course, would be the exception—were to keep silence from Compline until Terce.¹¹⁶ The sisters were

¹¹⁵ *FLCI* 4:24.

¹¹⁶ *FLCI* 5:1.

to keep silence everywhere in the monastery and, in particular, those spaces where they were in close proximity and where it might be most tempting to lose one's focus—the church, dormitory, and while eating in the refectory.¹¹⁷ The one exception to the rule of silence was in the infirmary where any sister might “speak with discernment at any time they saw fit for the recreation and service of the sick.”¹¹⁸ Since Clare had spent much of her life as an invalid, she certainly understood the need for the sick to have useful conversation as well as occasional levity to ease their pain. In an age when there was little pain relief for the ailments of either body or spirit, human interaction was often the best medicine. Clare did not withhold this human interaction from the sick, nor did she require that sisters seek permission for spontaneous interactions they felt might be helpful. Clare knew that if a particular sister abused the permission to speak in the infirmary, that the mutual charity and discernment of the sisters within the monastery would gently correct the offender.

For Clare, there was no need for sign language within the monastery as Innocent IV had described in his constitutions, since if there was truly a need to speak, the sisters might “always and everywhere speak briefly in a quiet voice what is necessary to convey.”¹¹⁹ Again, the discretion of the sisters sufficed for this; there was no need to bother the abbess for these permissions. If sisters became lax in this regard, both the abbess and other sisters could gently remind them of their ideal.

In the spirit of silence necessary for the contemplative life, it is obvious that sisters could speak in the parlor of the monastery or at the grill in the choir only with the permission of the abbess or her vicaress.¹²⁰ A sacristan, for instance, might need to communicate at the grill briefly with a priest regarding a change in the time of services or special preparations for a liturgical feast. Sisters with permission might speak with an occasional visitor, a workman, or someone with a special need in the parlor. Like any modest medieval woman, however, no woman would enter into conversations without being in the presence and hearing of others.¹²¹ The mutual charity of the S. Damiano monastery was without secrets. No individual sister entered into

¹¹⁷ *FLCI* 5:2.

¹¹⁸ *FLCI* 5:3.

¹¹⁹ *FLCI* 5:4.

¹²⁰ *FLCI* 5:5.

¹²¹ *FLCI* 5:6.

private conversations with outsiders or placed herself above the rest. With this same decorum, if there was need for a sister to speak at the grill, at least three other sisters who were appointed by the abbess or vicaress from the eight discreets were to be present.¹²² Speaking in the church was rarely done, and there needed to be a true and approved reason for this. Hilarity or superfluous speech between the sisters and outsiders at the grill could easily be witnessed by those who visited the monastic church and would not only disturb monastic silence, but could cause scandal among the faithful. Since speaking at the grill was to be a rare event, the abbess and vicaress were bound to this same discipline.¹²³

As had been described already in the Ugolinian *forma vitae*, Clare required that a cloth was to be hung on the inside of the grill. This cloth was removed only when the Word of God was proclaimed or, on the rare occasion, when a sister was speaking with someone at the grill.¹²⁴ If the sisters wanted to hear clearly what was happening on the outside, it would be necessary to remove this covering.

Because the grill could be approached through the church, it needed to be secured. In this, Clare exceeded the demands of both Ugolino's and Innocent's legislation. While papal provisions demanded that the grill be secured with wooden doors, iron bars, and a key, Clare was eager to preserve the integrity of both her monastery and its abbess. In Clare's *forma vitae*, the grill was to have "a wooden door with two different iron locks, thoroughly secured by bars and bolts, so that, especially at night, it is locked with two keys—the abbess has one, the sacristan has the other."¹²⁵ In other words, no one in the monastery, not even the abbess, could exit during the night or at any other time without the knowledge of another sister since the door "is always to remain locked."¹²⁶ This meant not only that the abbess could not escape, but perhaps, more importantly, that she could never be accused of infidelity by those who might wish to injure the reputation of the monastery. There was, of course, no question that sisters would ever speak to anyone at the grill during the great silence.¹²⁷

¹²² *FLCI* 5:7.

¹²³ *FLCI* 5:8.

¹²⁴ *FLCI* 5:10.

¹²⁵ *FLCI* 5:11–12.

¹²⁶ *FLCI* 5:13.

¹²⁷ *FLCI* 5:14.

The cloth covering the parlor window was not to be moved aside.¹²⁸ During the two great Lents, the Lent of St. Martin (Dec. 11–24) and the Lent before Easter, only sisters receiving the sacrament of confession or engaging in another obvious necessity—left to the discretion of the abbess or her vicaress—were able to speak.¹²⁹

When one examines Clare's process of canonization and tries to imagine how the grill and parlor actually worked at the time of Clare, one finds more questions than answers. Sister Filippa stated in her testimony that the son of Lord Giovanni di Maestro Giovanni, who was the procurator of S. Damiano, had a son with a high fever and communicated this to the sisters. In the presence of S. Filippa, Clare touched the boy and made the sign of the cross over him. It seems that this would have required that Clare see the child who certainly would have been unduly frightened by a hand touching him through a curtain! The boy was immediately cured, but S. Filippa testified that she never saw the boy again. Apparently Lord Giovanni brought the boy to the monastery when he was desperate for a cure, but did not use the monastery as a regular playground for his child.¹³⁰ Sister Cecilia also testified that she had been with Clare when she made the sign of the cross over those from the outside who were ill. While she kept watch with Clare at this time, Sister Cecilia paid no real attention to this outside business as she testified that she did not know the names of those cured, did not see them at the time, and had not seen them before their cures.¹³¹ Sister Benvenuta of Perugia said that other sisters who had since died had told her that a young boy, who was three or four years old, had placed a small pebble up his nose that could not be extricated. He was brought to Clare and, when she made the sign of the cross over him, the pebble immediately fell from his nose. Benvenuta claimed that she had seen the young boy healthy after his cure.¹³² Sister Amata testified concerning a lady from Pisa who believed she was delivered from five demons through the merits of Clare. This lady, according to Sister Amata, came to the monastery where one speaks to the sisters, so that she could first thank God and then Clare. Sister

¹²⁸ *FLCl* 5:15.

¹²⁹ *FLCl* 5:16–17.

¹³⁰ *Process* 3:15.

¹³¹ *Process* 6:9.

¹³² *Process* 2:18.

Amata testified that this happened four or five years before Clare's death.¹³³

It is perhaps clear that Clare ministered to the ill with the curtain open or perhaps through a very thin curtain. It is unclear whether Clare cured those coming to the monastery in the parlor or at the grill. While it is not difficult to imagine this occurring in the parlor, one might also think of this happening at the grill in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, in the contemplative ambience needed for profound prayer, and with the solemnity and silence that evident need and a petition for God's healing required.

CHAPTER SIX

Of all the chapters in Clare's *forma vitae*, this chapter is evidently autobiographical and indeed the true center of the text. Although, as we have seen, Clare's *forma vitae* is synthetic throughout in its reworking and rewriting of various rules, papal legislation, and other secondary material, it is within this chapter that the voice and spirit of Clare resound most clearly. Clare had witnessed first hand what had happened to Francis's *Testament* as well as the friars Rule of 1223,¹³⁴ and wanted to make sure that her desires for the Monastery of S. Damiano survived not only through the last words of a dying foundress, but also encased within the very legislation of the community. Clare's chapter is divided into two sections: 1) Clare's autobiographical account of her conversion and the *forma vitae* given her by Francis, and 2) The legacy of Clare and her sisters accompanied by Francis's last will to the S. Damiano sisters.

Clare began by offering a simple summary of her conversion: "After the Most High Father of the heavens saw fit by his grace to enlighten my heart to do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed father, S. Francis, shortly after his own conversion, I, together with my sisters, willingly promised him obedience."¹³⁵ The

¹³³ *Process* 4:20.

¹³⁴ See David Flood, "The Order's Masters: Franciscan Institutions from 1226 to 1280," in *Dalla 'sequela Christi' di Francesco d'Assisi all'apologia della povertà*, ed. Enrico Menestò, 41–78 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1992).

¹³⁵ *FLCI* 6:1. Concerning the ecclesiastical meaning of this early promise of obedience see Andrea Boni, "La legislazione Clariana nel contesto giuridico delle sue origini e della sua evoluzione," *Antonianum* 70 (1995): 47–98.

impetus of Clare's conversion is the enlightenment of the Most High Father of the heavens. Clare's words echo Francis's prayer before the S. Damiano crucifix in which Francis begged God within his own vocational discernment to "enlighten the darkness of my heart."¹³⁶ The enlightenment that Clare received was "to do penance," to spend her life as a medieval penitent after the example and teaching of Francis. One recalls Francis's own words concerning his conversion in the *Testament*: "The Lord then gave me, Brother Francis, to begin doing penance in this way."¹³⁷

Clare dated the time of her promise of obedience to Francis as being shortly after Francis's conversion, and also after she had sisters. We know that Clare's sister, Catherine, who in religion was renamed Agnes, joined Clare in her penitential life while she was staying at S. Angelo di Panzo.¹³⁸ Perhaps other women from Assisi also joined Clare while at S. Angelo or, more probably, after she moved into S. Damiano.¹³⁹

Although Clare does not give further historical evidence, it seems most likely that Francis would have accepted the small community of sisters either at the time they moved into the S. Damiano monastery that he and his brothers had prepared for them, or shortly afterwards. Clare placed her obedience into the hands of Francis as did her companion sisters. Francis, knowing that his small group of brothers could not support a monastery of women with many needs, first tested the women to make sure that Clare and her sisters could truly embrace the kind of poverty that his life demanded from them. The move from nobility to poverty was not easy. The sisters needed to accept poverty, manual labor, trials, the disregard of others, and the contempt of the world. Francis needed evidence that they could not only withstand these things, but would accept them with freedom and joy. It was only after this testing, that Francis wrote his *forma vitae* for the sisters.¹⁴⁰ Obviously, Francis was able to tonsure Clare, knowing that she could faithfully live a penitential life according to his preaching and example,

¹³⁶ FF 165.

¹³⁷ *Testament* 1.

¹³⁸ "Vita Sororis Agnetis, Germanae Sanctae Clarae," in *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*, AFH 3 (1897): 173–82.

¹³⁹ In Clare's canonization process, Sister Pacifica testified that "she entered the Order at the same time as Clare (*Process* 1:2)." Sister Benvenuta of Perugia testified that she "had entered S. Damiano after Clare in the month of September (*Process* 2:1)."

¹⁴⁰ FLCl 6:2.

without proof that Clare could live a life of strict poverty. We see from the beginning, therefore, a distinction made by Francis himself between a penitential monastery and a monastery that embraced strict poverty. While the brothers might minister spiritually to women who embraced the first model, they would need to serve both the temporal and spiritual needs of women who professed the second model. This would, of necessity, require more of a commitment from the brothers.

Clare archived the *forma vitae* that Francis gave to her at the very center of her text.¹⁴¹ The writing is typical of Francis and does not beg for more. At these early stages, Franciscan life was organic rather than juridical. Francis was establishing a simple, straight-forward relationship with Clare and her sisters.

Because by divine inspiration, you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the Most High King, the Father of the heavens, and have espoused yourselves to the Holy Spirit, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and my brothers always to have the same attentive care and special solicitude for you as for them.¹⁴²

Again, the beginning of the Franciscan vocation is divine inspiration. Francis does not mention his own preaching and teaching as Clare does. The inspiration of the Franciscan vocation is, echoing Francis's *Salutation to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, from the "Most High King, the Father of the heavens."¹⁴³ Clare was inspired by the same Most High Father as Mary, "the virgin made church."¹⁴⁴ She had chosen to follow Jesus Christ according to the perfection of the holy gospel, a reference as always in early Franciscan literature to Matthew 19:20, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you

¹⁴¹ Concerning Francis's writings to Clare and her sisters see Niklaus Kuster, "Gli scritti di Francesco a Chiara: Autenticità e importanza," in *Verba Domini Mei: Gli 'Opuscula' di Francesco d'Assisi a 25 anni dalla edizione di Kajetan Esser, OFM*, ed. Alvaro Cacciotti, 363–81 (Rome: Edizioni Antonianum, 2003); Carlo Paolazzi, "Per l'autenticità degli scritti di Francesco alle pauperes domine," in *Clara Claris Praeclara: L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte*, 307–37 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004); and Maria Maddalena Terzoni, "La forma vivendi e l'ultima voluntas: Due testimonianze di Francesco nella regola di Santa Chiara," *Forma Sororum* 41 (2004): 78–87, 165–75, 247–57.

¹⁴² *FLCI* 6:3–4.

¹⁴³ See Antiphon for Compline from the Office of the Passion, *FF* 146.

¹⁴⁴ Giovanni Boccali, "Santa Chiara volto e immagine della Vergine Maria," in *Dialoghi con Chiara di Assisi*, ed. Luigi Giacometti, 151–88 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995).

will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me.” This choice of living “according to the perfection of the holy gospel,” is the choice to espouse oneself to the Holy Spirit. Clare’s vocation is a call to the fullness of Trinitarian life and union.

Because Clare and her sisters’ vocation was firmly grounded in Trinitarian dynamism and the practical promise to expect and embrace poverty as their greatest delight, Francis and his brothers were able to enter into a mutual relationship with them. Francis promised that Clare and her sisters were one with his community of brothers. Because Clare had promised not only to live a penitential lifestyle, but a life of radical poverty, she had proved herself to be in community with Francis and his brothers. Although living their lives according to their sex, the lifestyle of the brothers and sisters was essentially the same. Both were truly poor. Because of this, Francis promised Clare and her sisters that he would always have the same attentive care and special solicitude for them as for his brothers.¹⁴⁵

Writers and artists, who portray the relationship between Francis and Clare as a sublimated love affair, miss the point. Clare’s deepest desire was to love God, and Francis showed her by example and preaching a way to God. Francis’s “attentive care and special solicitude” was the concrete recognition that the brothers and sisters were poor together and needed each other in the concrete reality of their poverty. While the brothers begged for the sisters and ministered to their pastoral needs, the sisters nourished the brothers and cared for them when they were ill. When brothers and sisters were truly poor, they were truly brothers and sisters. Concerning Francis’s intention, Clare testified, “as long as he lived, he truly fulfilled this promise, and wanted his brothers always to do the same.”¹⁴⁶

Shortly before dying in 1226, Francis wrote his last will to Clare and her sisters. Clare archived this precious text in chapter six “so that we and also those coming after us would never turn away from the most holy poverty that we have acquired.”¹⁴⁷ While Francis had entrusted his brothers with his *Testament*, Clare had seen factions within the brotherhood progressively whittle away at Francis’s most basic meaning. In an attempt to protect her sisters from these sorts of disputes

¹⁴⁵ *FLCl* 6:4.

¹⁴⁶ *FLCl* 6:5.

¹⁴⁷ *FLCl* 6:6.

and from the benevolent, although ill-placed directives of those might want to endow the S. Damiano monastery, Clare archived Francis's last will for her sisters in the very center of the legislative text of her monastery:

I, little brother Francis, want to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and of his Most Holy Mother and to persevere in this until the end. And I beg and counsel you, my ladies, always to live in this most holy life and poverty. Guard yourselves carefully that you never, in any respect whatsoever, turn away from this because of the teaching or advice of anyone.¹⁴⁸

At the end of his life, Francis's agenda was still clear, simply to "follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and of his Most Holy Mother and to persevere in this until the end." Even as he lay dying, Francis wanted to persevere as Christ had loved humanity, "until the end."¹⁴⁹ Knowing poverty to be his greatest treasure, Francis begged and counseled the sisters at S. Damiano "always to live in this most holy life and poverty." While the sisters of S. Damiano could never have recouped the dowries and other riches that they had given away to the poor, there were benefactors, including the papacy itself, who would have been delighted to endow their monastery. Because other monastics lived exemplary religious lives in this way, Francis knew that it would always be an enticement for the S. Damiano sisters to adopt the ownership of common property. Given this temptation, Francis could only "beg and counsel" the sisters always to be true to their form of poverty. Poverty was Francis's greatest treasure. As he lay dying, it was the only thing he had to give to his S. Damiano sisters.

To protect the sisters against compromising their poverty, Francis urged them to guard themselves, not against riches, but against "teaching or advice." Francis knew that the sisters would reject riches outright, but were always open to theological and pastoral teaching that enriched their spiritual lives. In listening, even to spiritual teaching, they were to guard themselves, so that they would never "in any respect whatsoever" turn away from living the poverty of Christ and his Holy Mother. This advice could come from "anyone," but no matter who it came from, the sisters were to guard themselves against it. In her second letter to Agnes of Prague, Clare alluded to this directive

¹⁴⁸ *FLCI* 6:7–9.

¹⁴⁹ John 13:1.

of Francis regarding the advice of Gregory IX, telling Agnes, “even though you must respect him, still, do not follow his advice.”¹⁵⁰

At the end of her life, Clare and the sisters of S. Damiano had faithfully followed Christ and his Mother in the poverty that they had promised God and Blessed Francis. Using their example, Clare begged the abbesses and sisters who followed to do the same “inviolably until the end.”¹⁵¹ Clare not only did not permit room for compromise with the phrase “inviolably until the end,” but went on to spell out exactly what she meant by poverty as it was to be lived at S. Damiano:

This means that they are not to receive or acquire possessions or property by themselves or through an intermediary. Nor are they to have anything else that could reasonably be called property, except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and seclusion of the monastery. This land should not be cultivated, however, except for a garden for their needs.¹⁵²

The only property that the sisters might have was that which necessity required “for the integrity and seclusion of the monastery.” Just as a spirit of silence protected the inner seclusion of the sisters, their outer seclusion, as well as the integrity of their religious life, needed to be safeguarded. Clare did not want land to be used to make money for the sisters. While they could have a garden for their own needs, the sisters were not to cultivate land to grow surplus produce. Clare’s directive of no property, no revenues, and no endowment could not have been clearer. Yet, Clare’s text is hardly a cold, ascetic command, for this chapter’s end must be read in light of its beginning. The sisters embraced poverty through the inspiration of God, in the following of Christ and his Most Holy Mother, and as spouses of the Holy Spirit. One embraces poverty not for the sake of poverty, but for the sake of the enlightenment and joy of Trinitarian life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A monastery without endowments was a monastery that could not hire workers to do mundane tasks. Clare’s choice of poverty was *ipso facto* the choice to do manual labor. In associating herself and her sis-

¹⁵⁰ 2LAg 17.

¹⁵¹ FLCl 6:11.

¹⁵² FLCl 6:12–15.

ters with those who worked, Clare countered the very fabric of medieval society so often characterized by the classic grouping of people: those who prayed (monastics), those who fought (knights and warriors), and those who worked (serfs and other laborers)—notice that those who begged are still ignored even in contemporary descriptions! Clare described her sisters as monastics who not only prayed, but also did manual labor usually assigned to the poor.

The time for work was set in Clare's *forma vitae* as being after the hour of Terce. It was at this time, that those who were "given the grace to work" performed their assigned tasks.¹⁵³ Clare uses a text from the brothers' Rule of 1223, "Let those brothers, whom the Lord has given the grace to work, work faithfully and devotedly,"¹⁵⁴ in composing her own text. For those who followed the Poor Christ, labor was not a chosen ascetical practice but a reality of daily life. Like the brothers, the sisters worked "faithfully and devotedly." Their spirit of prayer and their very vocation demanded work. What protected their "spirit of holy prayer and devotion" was that the work was not defined by an individual agenda but pertained "to the integrity and service of the community."¹⁵⁵ In work, therefore, one's love of God was love of neighbor. Work not related to the "integrity and service of the community," and therefore not connected to the love of neighbor, had no place within the S. Damiano community. While work done for one's own advancement invites a spirit of care and preoccupation,¹⁵⁶ work done simply because it is needed by a community tends to be devoid of self-aggrandizement. Community service was done, as Clare quotes directly from the brothers' Rule of 1223, so that "banishing idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion whom all things of time ought to serve devotedly."¹⁵⁷

Because the work done was for the service of the community, and it was this communal love and shared service among the sisters that preserved the spirit of prayer and devotion, it was the community that needed to discern the work to be done, and who was best to do it. Dividing the duties of the household was facilitated at the S. Damiano monastery during the weekly chapter, when the abbess or her vicar

¹⁵³ *FLCI* 7:1.

¹⁵⁴ *LR* 5:1.

¹⁵⁵ *FLCI* 7:1.

¹⁵⁶ See *ER* 22:19–20; 25–26.

¹⁵⁷ *FLCI* 7:2.

assigned in everyone's presence the needed manual labor.¹⁵⁸ This assignment was done in the context of the weekly chapter where the sisters were able to discuss and share their viewpoints regarding the workings of the monastery. Various tasks would have included cleaning, gardening, cooking, caring for the sick, spinning, and attending to the care of the chapel. These assignments were given in the context of mutual care and concern for all the sisters. Clare, always aware of the need for transparency when nurturing the souls of her sisters, knew that her sisters would respond to true needs with generosity and discernment. In this way, the sisters, many of whom came from the noble class, could perform the lowest duties with freedom, dignity, and joy.

Any alms that the monastery received were also announced at the chapter "so that they can remember their benefactors in prayer together."¹⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that the reception of alms and the subsequent prayer for donors was not done in the choir where the public might hear, but in the inner recesses of the monastery. Donors who offered alms to the Monastery of S. Damiano did so for the good of their souls, and the sisters protected their reward from being compromised by worldly acclaim.

The alms were "distributed for the benefit of the community by the abbess or her vicaress with the counsel of the discreets."¹⁶⁰ The personal needs of sisters, of course, were not shared with all, and it was the role of the abbess or her vicaress with the discreets of the monastery to have a sense of those with true needs. This handling of alms allowed both for transparency and for discernment within the monastery. If the community of sisters truly felt that there was inequity in the distribution of alms, they were always free to replace their leaders with those who might better secure the charity and integrity of the monastery.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Clare copied chapter six of the brothers' Rule of 1223, into her *forma vitae* nearly word for word in the first part of this chapter. Like the

¹⁵⁸ *FLCI* 7:3. See also *Testament* 20–21. Francis willed that his brothers work with their hands. Manual labor is necessary to a Franciscan way of life.

¹⁵⁹ *FLCI* 7:4.

¹⁶⁰ *FLCI* 7:5.

brothers, the sisters were not to have a house, a place, or anything at all.¹⁶¹ Because the sisters were pilgrims and strangers in this world “serving the Lord in poverty and humility,” they were not to go out for alms like the brothers, but were to send for alms.¹⁶² They should not be ashamed of their need for alms because “the Lord himself became poor for us in this world.”¹⁶³

The summit of most high poverty was that the sisters were “heiresses and queens of the Heavenly King, poor in all things, but exalted in the virtues.”¹⁶⁴ This, indeed, was their “portion that leads into the land of the living.”¹⁶⁵ Clinging to this poverty, they were never to desire anything else of this world for the name not only of Jesus Christ, as in the brother’s Rule, but also of his Most Holy Mother.¹⁶⁶ For Clare, a Poor Sister followed not only Christ in poverty, but also Mary, his mother.

At this juncture, Clare leaves the brothers’ Rule of 1223, and loosely paraphrases the Rule of S. Benedict in order to deal with issues specific to monastic life. The abbess’s permission was needed if a sister wanted to send a letter, to give something away outside the monastery, or to receive a gift.¹⁶⁷ While a sister should not have anything in her possession that was not given her by the abbess,¹⁶⁸ if a relative or someone else sent the sister something, the abbess could permit her to receive it.¹⁶⁹ Otherwise, it was to be given to a sister in need.¹⁷⁰ If money was given, there was no question that every sister in the monastery would need something. Therefore, in the case of a small donation of money, the abbess with the counsel of the discreets could provide for the needs of the sister whose relatives or friends sent the money.¹⁷¹ Again, all of this was done with the counsel of discreets, who provided the needed discernment should a sister be tempted to abuse this caveat.

The sick of the monastery were a special case, and it was typical of monastic rules to provide whatever leniency their health required. What Clare uniquely contributed was not only leniency, but also

¹⁶¹ *FLCI* 8:1; *LR* 6:1.

¹⁶² *FLCI* 8:2; *LR* 6:2.

¹⁶³ *FLCI* 8:3; *LR* 6:3.

¹⁶⁴ *FLCI* 8:4; *LR* 6:4. Clare, of course, feminized Francis’s text here.

¹⁶⁵ *FLCI* 8:5; *LR* 6:5.

¹⁶⁶ *FLCI* 8:6; *LR* 6:6.

¹⁶⁷ *FLCI* 8:7. Clare paraphrases *RB* 33:2 and *RB* 54:1.

¹⁶⁸ *FLCI* 8:8; *RB* 33:5.

¹⁶⁹ *FLCI* 8:9. Clare paraphrases *RB* 54:2.

¹⁷⁰ *FLCI* 8:10. Compare *RB* 54:3–4.

¹⁷¹ *FLCI* 8:11. Compare *RB* 4:1–3.

sisterly interaction and care that supported the sisters psychologically as well as physically. The abbess personally and through other sisters was obliged to inquire with the greatest care concerning the state of the sick sisters of the monastery.¹⁷² The sick were the abbess's special responsibility, but they were not her responsibility alone. All the sisters interacting with the sick were to be attentive to their every need.

In the Rule of 1223, Francis advised his brothers to care for the sick just as they would wish to be treated themselves.¹⁷³ Clare offered this same counsel, but placed its particulars within the context of monastic life. As the resources of the monastery permitted, the abbess was mercifully to provide medical attention, special food, or any other necessities according to a sister's needs.¹⁷⁴ Sick sisters were not to withhold information that might be critical in discerning how best they might be served,¹⁷⁵ but just as Francis had advised in the Rule of 1223,¹⁷⁶ they were to make their needs known with confidence to their sisters, for, paraphrasing again the Rule of 1223, "if a mother loves and nourishes her biological daughter, how much more diligently should a sister love and nourish her spiritual sister."¹⁷⁷

While Ugolino's *forma vitae* differentiated between those who are sick and those who are gravely ill,¹⁷⁸ Clare distinguished simply the needs of the ill.¹⁷⁹ The sick may lie on "sacks filled with straw and have feather pillows for their head. Those needing woolen slippers and quilts may use them."¹⁸⁰ While cold and hardness defined the sleeping conditions of S. Damiano, those who were ill were given a reprieve.

Outside visitors of the sick were permitted to enter the infirmary when a sister was unable to go to the parlor. When there were visitors, any of the infirmed sisters could respond briefly with good words if the visitors spoke to them.¹⁸¹ This was not to encourage hilarity, but polite decorum in a situation that must have been challenging to

¹⁷² *FLCl* 8:12.

¹⁷³ *LR* 6:9.

¹⁷⁴ *FLCl* 8:13.

¹⁷⁵ *FLCl* 8:15.

¹⁷⁶ *LR* 6:8.

¹⁷⁷ *FLCl* 8:16; *LR* 6:8.

¹⁷⁸ *FLUg* 8.

¹⁷⁹ *FLCl* 8:17.

¹⁸⁰ *FLCl* 8:17–18.

¹⁸¹ *FLCl* 8:19.

sisters unaccustomed to having visitors in their living space. The sisters were not left to fend for themselves, but were accompanied during the visit by other sisters who had permission to speak from the abbess or her vicaress.¹⁸² Sisters accompanying visitors to the infirmary, even the abbess and her vicaress, were to be in the presence and hearing of two assigned discreets of the monastery.¹⁸³

While Clare's description of visitors to the infirmary might, at first glance, seem strict and even a bit artificial, in comparison to other monastic rules, it is refreshingly humane. It should be noted that visitors to Clare's monastery came into the infirmary, rather than requiring sick sisters be transported on their beds to another place. In regard to interacting with outside visitors who came into the infirmary, the Ugolinian *forma vitae* stated that the sick and the healthy must both have specific permission from the abbess to speak and must have three assigned sisters in their presence and hearing before speaking.¹⁸⁴ Innocent IV's *forma vitae* insisted that the abbess or her sisters could never allow any religious or secular person to enter the monastery unless permission was granted by the apostolic see or by the general or provincial minister of the Friars Minor. Exceptions to this prohibition were the doctor, blood-letter, those protecting the monastery from fire or danger of violence, and needed workmen.¹⁸⁵ Clare's *forma vitae* is unique in permitting outside visitors in the infirmary, perhaps friars who might preach and cheer the sisters, and perhaps, according to the discretion of the abbess, others as well.

In any case, while the Monastery of S. Damiano was truly poor and its ability to care for the sick was certainly impacted by this poverty, Clare granted the abbess great latitude to make any provision whatsoever that might bring healing or cheer to those sisters who suffered illness. While decorum and order were preserved in the infirmary, what happened within was determined not so much by law, but by true sisterly care. It was in the infirmary, especially, that the care of the soul of each sister was seen in its Franciscan uniqueness.

¹⁸² *FLCI* 8:20.

¹⁸³ *FLCI* 8:21.

¹⁸⁴ *FLUG* 6, 10.

¹⁸⁵ *FLInn* 3, 6.

CHAPTER NINE

Clare next attended to the discipline of sisters who disrupted the common life of the monastery. The cause of such disruption was a spiritual, rather than physical challenge that required special care both for the sister and for the common monastic life. Clare began by paraphrasing the opening line of the seventh chapter of the friar's Rule of 1223, "If a sister, through the prompting of the enemy, seriously sins."¹⁸⁶ For Clare, these serious sins are not a list of previously described problems, but offences "against the form of our profession."¹⁸⁷ This places the discussion in the spirit of the friar's Rule of 1221 that described a brother who was living "according to the flesh rather than the Spirit."¹⁸⁸ Like this brother, the "serious sin" of a sister was not to be judged by worldly standards, but according to the standard of the *forma vitae* at the S. Damiano monastery. A sister who perhaps spoke without merit, had in her possession without permission a small gift from a relative, ate privately, or committed other such offenses that were "serious" by S. Damiano standards was to be "admonished" two or three times by the abbess or the other sisters. While the Rule of 1221, reminded the brothers that this correction was to be done "humbly and attentively,"¹⁸⁹ Clare took this for granted. It is interesting to note that the correction of a sister by her peers was just as weighty for Clare as the admonishment of the abbess who may not have witnessed what happened in every corner of the monastery. In the Monastery of S. Damiano, every sister was responsible for the quality of virtuous living, not just the abbess. It was always the hope that those who needed assistance in living the *forma vitae* of the S. Damiano monastery would immediately reform any problematic behavior after a simple sisterly reminder.

The process of Franciscan correction follows the gospel mandate outlined in Matthew 18:15–17. First, if someone sins against a brother or sister, the brother or sister should correct the sinner. If the sinner listens, charity has overcome the offence. If the sinner does not listen, the corrector should take two or three others as witnesses. If this fails, then the offense was to be revealed to the church.

¹⁸⁶ *FLCI* 9:1; *LR* 7:1.

¹⁸⁷ *FLCI* 9:1.

¹⁸⁸ *ER* 5:5.

¹⁸⁹ *ER* 5:5.

Following this progression, if a sister refused to amend her problematic behavior after two or three admonitions, the private correction became public. For as many days as she remained obstinate, she was to eat bread and water on the floor in the refectory before all the sisters.¹⁹⁰ While this public correction seems harsh, it was more lenient than the Rule of S. Benedict that mandated that a monastic guilty of serious fault should be excluded from the table and the oratory.¹⁹¹ In Clare's care, an abbess could discern if further or a different sort of punishment was needed, but exclusion from community prayer was never considered. If anything, a sister under the influence of the "promptings of the enemy" needed to pray. Clare advised the sister who found herself in this painful situation to pray that the Lord would "enlighten her heart to do penance."¹⁹² One remembers again Francis's prayer before the S. Damiano crucifix at the very beginning of his conversion: "Most High, Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart."¹⁹³ A sister was able to live a penitential lifestyle—the *forma vitae* lived at S. Damiano—only when her heart was enlightened.

Both Francis and Clare understood the pain and potential division that public correction could create within a community. The sin of one truly affected the spirit of the entire community. Both in the brothers' 1221 and 1223 Rules, Francis warned against any anger or agitation that might erupt because of the fault of another,¹⁹⁴ and Clare transposed his warning into her own *forma vitae*: "The abbess and her sisters, however, must be careful not to become angry or disturbed because of another's sin, for anger and agitation prevent charity in oneself and others."¹⁹⁵ While one might be tempted to be irritated with the unrepentant, charity must always remain the mode of living within the monastery. As a sister was being invited to reform, the others were to persevere in their *forma vitae* without being affected by the sinful behavior. Clare assumed that mercy and love would eventually win over a sister's heart. There was no process for the excommunication of a sister from the S. Damiano monastery, other than—in the most

¹⁹⁰ *FLCI* 9:2.

¹⁹¹ *RB* 24:3–5; 25:1–5.

¹⁹² *FLCI* 9:4.

¹⁹³ *FF* 165.

¹⁹⁴ *ER* 5:7; *LR* 7:3.

¹⁹⁵ *FLCI* 9:5.

stubborn and insolent case—the general permission that the abbess might discern another punishment if required.

In a situation where many sisters lived in close proximity, there would be times when one sister by word or gesture might, intentionally or unintentionally, irritate or cause trouble for another. Wanting to impress upon her sisters that a lack of care and concern was no small fault, Clare added the expression, *quod absit*—“may this never happen.”¹⁹⁶ While the case of the unrepentant sister was a spiritual sickness that required discernment, tenderness, and mercy even as painful remedies were applied, a sister who snubbed, belittled, or offended another sister threatened the very fabric of charity that held the community together. While all could clearly see an obvious offense against the *forma vitae*, a lapse in charity was a more insidious offense that could readily infect from the inside what seemed good on the outside. Clare truly meant her *quod absit*, seeing the need to immediately repent of any lapse in charity.

A sister who offended another was asked to “not only immediately prostrate herself humbly at the feet of the other begging pardon, but also beg her with true simplicity to intercede for her to the Lord that he might forgive her.”¹⁹⁷ This was to be done before the sister offered “the gift of her prayer in the presence of the Lord.”¹⁹⁸ While a Benedictine monk might prostrate himself in this way if a superior was angry with him,¹⁹⁹ in Clare’s *forma vitae*, a sister who had offended another sister prostrated herself and begged for prayer.²⁰⁰ In this, Clare followed exactly the words of the holy gospel: “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your sister has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first, and be reconciled with your sister, and then come and offer your gift.”²⁰¹ At the Monastery of S. Damiano, prayer could not be offered unless the community reflected this prayer in perfect charity and peace between sisters. A sister who failed to keep the peace or who was uncharitable was to repent and repair immediately the harm she had done before the community offered its next prayer to God.

¹⁹⁶ *FLCI* 9:6.

¹⁹⁷ *FLCI* 9:7–8.

¹⁹⁸ *FLCI* 9:7.

¹⁹⁹ *RB* 71:6–8; 44:4.

²⁰⁰ *FLCI* 9:7–8.

²⁰¹ Matthew 5:23–24.

In response, the sister who was offended “remembering that word of the Lord: ‘If you do not forgive from the heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you,’²⁰² generously forgives her sister every wrong she has done her.”²⁰³ Forgiveness is an essential element in a Christian community; the one who does not forgive, separates herself from the community. In an atmosphere of charity, there is the possibility that the person who was offended might not have even perceived the offense. Clare did not see a reason to consider this. The only response was to treat the offending sister with generous forgiveness from the heart. One might particularly imagine the power of such a scenario in the case of an older sister prostrating herself before a younger sister, or in the case of the abbess or vicaress of the monastery prostrating herself before a newcomer.

One sees in Clare’s descriptors of monastic life the genius of Clare’s spiritual guidance of her sisters within the S. Damiano community. As sisters had nothing either personally or communally, there was little for them to dispute. If they were physically ill or became conflicted in their choice of their *forma vitae*, they were treated with charity, mercy, and prayer. In their dealings with each other, they were permitted only charity and kindness, and it is within this context of mutual charity that their prayers were offered to God. There were checks and balances on the authority of every person in the monastery from the abbess, to the vicaress, to the sinner. Clare created a legislative document that truly spoke to her experience of managing a female monastery. Her monastic life mirrored the love of God as the love of neighbor.

While the enclosed sisters might fail in their charitable love and care for each other, the serving sisters were faced with other temptations. Unlike the *forma vitae* of Innocent IV, which demanded that the serving sisters be given a specific time for their return,²⁰⁴ Clare simply stated that the sisters serving outside the monastery should not delay unless they are held up for some reason.²⁰⁵ Clare trusted that those serving outside the monastery were capable of discerning whether or not more time was needed for their business. They were to speak modestly, simply, and briefly, and do their business with honor so that

²⁰² Matthew 18:35.

²⁰³ *FLCI* 9:9–10.

²⁰⁴ *FLInn* 10.

²⁰⁵ *FLCI* 9:11.

those who saw them were edified by their virtuous behavior.²⁰⁶ While the Rule of 1223, exhorted the brothers to avoid zealously all suspicious dealings with women,²⁰⁷ Clare used these same words to warn the sisters serving outside the monastery to avoid suspicious meetings or dealings with others.²⁰⁸ Like the brothers, as outlined in the Rule of 1223, because of the scandal that might evolve, they were not to consent to be godmothers.²⁰⁹

Loosely referring to the Rule of S. Benedict,²¹⁰ Clare reminded the sisters serving outside the monastery that they were not “to presume to repeat the gossip of the world inside the monastery.”²¹¹ Even worse would be to carry stories that could cause scandal concerning the inner sanctum of the monastery into the public arena.²¹² If a sister “guilelessly offends” by speaking of the gossip of the world inside the monastery, or by telling stories concerning S. Damiano outside of the monastery, Clare advised the abbess to give her a merciful penance.²¹³ Clare understood that bridging the outside of the monastery and the sisters inside was a difficult task that required mature discernment. Mistakes could be made. However, if a sister habitually offended in these ways, the abbess with the counsel of the discreet was to “impose a penance on her according to the nature of the fault.”²¹⁴ Because the fault of a sister serving outside of the monastery had the potential to erupt quickly into a scandal, Clare needed to maintain a delicate balance. A mistake required the prudence of the abbess, but laxity necessitated action, still merciful, that protected the reputation of both the serving sister as well as the monastery.

CHAPTER TEN

The abbess is to spend time with her sisters, not advising them to do anything that is contrary to their souls or their profession. The

²⁰⁶ *FLCI* 9:12.

²⁰⁷ *LR* 11:1.

²⁰⁸ *FLCI* 9:13.

²⁰⁹ *FLCI* 9:14; *LR* 11:3.

²¹⁰ *RB* 67:5. Benedict states that “no one should presume to relate to anyone else what he saw or heard outside the monastery.”

²¹¹ *FLCI* 9:15.

²¹² *FLCI* 9:16.

²¹³ *FLCI* 9:17.

²¹⁴ *FLCI* 9:18.

first sentence of this chapter was taken directly from the friars Rule of 1223, with the necessary changes in gender and the reordering of Francis's verbs "visit and instruct" to Clare's "instruct and visit."²¹⁵ A superior's visitation of the friars was essential to the administrative order of the fraternity. Obviously, with the abbess living with them everyday, Clare downplays visitation and identifies the instruction of the sisters as the abbess's primary responsibility. The verb "visit," in Clare's context, focused on the care the abbess had for each sister. She was to know her sisters intimately and, to this end, she needed to spend time listening to them.

When giving correction, the abbess was not the mother to her daughters, but a sister among sisters. As such, she was to discipline them with humility and charity. As a sister among sisters, any correction made by an abbess was done with the intention of inviting a sister to greater faithfulness. Only charity, of course, could persuade a sister to feel safe enough to put aside every excuse, to listen with care to the abbess, and to reform her behavior. The goal of instruction, personal interaction, and correction of the sisters was faithfulness to the sisters' *forma vitae*—the life that God inspired them to lead.²¹⁶

As the abbess was responsible for caring for the souls of her sisters, the sisters under her were "to remember that for God's sake they have renounced their own wills."²¹⁷ It is important to note that Clare reminded her sisters that they had renounced their own wills for the sake of God. Just as the brothers are obedient to their ministers, the sisters are "strictly obliged to obey their abbess in those things they promised the Lord to observe that are not contrary to the soul and our profession."²¹⁸ The only exception to obedience was an order that might be contrary to the soul, or that might be counter to the sisters' profession.

Clare exercised this caveat at times when it seemed that she was being commanded to do something contrary to her soul and profession. When Gregory IX wanted to give her monastery possessions, she went on a hunger strike, sent the begging brothers away, and refused to comply with Gregory's command. The *Legend of Clare* states:

²¹⁵ *FLCI* 10:1; *LR* 10:1.

²¹⁶ *FLCI* 10:1.

²¹⁷ *FLCI* 10:2.

²¹⁸ *FLCI* 10:3.

When he tried to convince her that because of the current events and the dangers of the world, she should consent to owning possessions that he himself willingly offered, she resisted with a forceful spirit and refused to acquiesce. To this, the pope replied: "If you fear for your vow, We absolve you from it." "Holy Father," she said, "I have absolutely no desire ever to be absolved from the following of Christ."²¹⁹

At another time, when Gregory IX was trying to persuade Agnes of Prague to accept an endowment for her monastery, Clare advised Agnes:

Indeed, if someone tells you something else or suggests anything to you that may hinder your perfection or seems contrary to your divine vocation, even though you must respect him, still, do not follow his advice. Instead, poor virgin, embrace the Poor Christ.²²⁰

Obviously, Clare believed that there were times when one needed to stand firmly against the requests of a superior. If Clare could refuse the pope, a sister could certainly refuse her abbess. Although Clare lifted this text concerning obedience from the brothers' Rule of 1223, Clare's insistence that a sister could legitimately disobey under certain circumstances evoked memories of a heavy history by the 1250s. There were brothers who tried to hold on to Francis's *Testament* and to a no-gloss interpretation of their Rule. Their protests had been pushed aside in favor of the clericalization of the Order.²²¹ It was in this ambiance, that Clare copied Francis's caveat into her *forma vitae*.

Unlike the friars, Clare envisioned that the sisters might be protected from disobedience at least to the abbess's commands because of the nature of their communal life. Rather than envisage the abbess as the lady of the house who was served by the sisters, Clare reversed the normal order: "On her part, let the abbess be so familiar with them that they can speak and act with her as ladies to their servant. For, since the abbess is the servant of all the sisters, that was how it should be."²²² It was not that the sisters could be disrespectful of their abbess—for this, certainly, would not be the mark of true ladies—but they could truly approach her without fear because Clare understood

²¹⁹ *LegCl* 9:13–15.

²²⁰ *2LAg* 17–18.

²²¹ Théophile Desbonnets, *De l'intuition à l'institution: Les Franciscains* (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1983). In English as *From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans*, trans. Paul Duggan and Jerry Du Charme (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

²²² *FLCl* 10:4–5.

the abbess to be the servant of all. Because she was the servant, the abbess was to know the needs of each of her sisters and was expected to be attentive to these needs. While the sisters were to be obedient by following the will of the community, as this was expressed by the abbess, the abbess was to be obedient by listening to the needs of her sisters just as a servant would listen to her lady's needs.

For Clare, the purpose of obedience was not so much about perfect religious order as it was about preserving charity among the sisters. The love that the sisters had for God was mirrored in their love for each other. Clare copied Francis's admonition to guard against "all pride, vainglory, envy, greed, worldly care and anxiety, detraction and murmuring," and added also that her sisters should guard against dissension and division.²²³

It is after this admonition that the Rule of 1223, next warned the brothers not to be anxious about becoming literate. Clare, instead, after cautioning her sisters against dissension and division, exhorted them: "Let them be eager always to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love that is the bond of perfection,"²²⁴ an allusion to Colossians 3:14. Critical to the enclosed life was the unity and charity of the monastery, and Clare used every opportunity to impress upon her sisters the necessity of preserving this unity.

Since both literate and illiterate sisters shared the same common life within the Monastery of S. Damiano, Clare urged them to avoid the custom of distinguishing between choir and lay sisters.²²⁵ There was not room for these divisions in her *forma vitae*, and she did not want her sisters to fall into the temptation of discriminating according to social class. After having seen the Franciscan friars progressively discriminate against the lay brothers in favor of clerics, Clare begged her sisters to preserve their common life without this dissension and division.

Clare again paraphrases the friars' Rule of 1223:

Let those who cannot read not be anxious to learn. Rather, let them study what they ought to desire above all else, the Spirit of the Lord and

²²³ *FLCI* 10:6; *LR* 10:7.

²²⁴ *FLCI* 10:7.

²²⁵ *LR* 10:7. Concerning this admonition in the brothers' Rule of 1223, see Pietro Maranesi, *Nescientes Litteras: L'ammonizione della regola francescana e la questione degli studi nell'ordine [Sec. XIII-XVI]* (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 2000), 29-66.

his holy work, to pray always to him with a pure heart, to have humility, patience in difficulty and sickness, and to love those who persecute, blame, and accuse us, for the Lord says: 'Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.' And, 'Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved.'²²⁶

Clare made three changes to this passage, changing Francis's "patience in persecution" to "patience in difficulty," an adaptation that reflects the difference between an active life in the world and life within the monastery. Grammatically, Clare edits the Latin of the brothers' Rule of 1223, taking out an extra "et" where it was not needed. Finally, Clare also omits the scripture "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute and speak evil concerning you." Prayer in the Monastery of S. Damiano focused on the praise of God, union with the birth, life, death, and eschatological glory of Jesus Christ, and gratitude for benefactors. While the prayer for one's enemies united one to Jesus' prayer on the cross, Clare did not make it a focal point of the prayer of the S. Damiano community. Enemies were not the focus of Clare's monastic life; rather, enemies are prayed for in union with Christ who is the true focus of the sister's love and prayer.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

While the legislation of Ugolino and Innocent IV was obsessed with the integrity of the enclosure of monasteries under papal protection, Clare, although not contesting the legislation regarding enclosure, did not permit it to define the essence of her religious life.²²⁷ While poverty was central to her *forma vitae*, Clare placed the rules concerning enclosure in the penultimate chapter. She edited Innocent IV's directives concerning enclosure down to one-quarter of his text, and Ugolino's by one-third. Although enclosure was not "the one thing necessary"

²²⁶ *FLCl* 10:8–13; *LR* 10:8–12.

²²⁷ Concerning the question of enclosure of Clare and her sisters see Chiara Augusta Lainati, "The Enclosure of St. Clare and of the First Poor Clares in Canonical Legislation and in Practice," *The Cord* 28 (1979): 4–15. Regarding the history of medieval enclosure see Jean Leclercq, "La clôture: Points de repère historiques," *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 43 (1981): 366–76; Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: 'Periculoso' and Its Commentators 1298–1545* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997). See also Colleen Maura McGrane, "The Rule of Virgins: The Evolution of Enclosure," *The American Benedictine Review* 59 (2008): 396–418.

for Clare, it is clear that Clare chose to be enclosed. There were many women connected with the Friars Minor who were not enclosed at the time of Clare. In Rome, for instance, the noblewoman Jacopa Settesoli lived a penitential lifestyle after the inspiration of Francis and provided housing when he stayed in Rome. Other women worked with the friars in hospitals and leprosariums. Clare did have a choice, and she chose enclosure.²²⁸

In her *forma vitae*, Clare deleted most of the instructions outlined for the monastic portress by Ugolino and Innocent IV and assumed that a portress of "mature character, discerning, and of a suitable age" and her suitable companion would behave accordingly, but added the directive that during the day the portress was "to stay near the door in an open cell without a door."²²⁹ Because everything that she did was seen, there was no need for the portress to run back and forth between the parlor and the monastery. Obviously enough visitors came to the S. Damiano monastery to warrant the presence of a portress at her post during the day.

Clare edited the legislation concerning the security of the door from Ugolino's and Innocent's legislation.²³⁰ She mentioned the hardware and protocols needed for the sisters' security and, although she edited the ramblings of the papal directives, she did not counter them in content.²³¹ To protect the reputation of all, Clare stipulated that the abbess should have one of the keys to the door, while the portress had the other. In this way, no sister, not even the portress or the abbess, was able to leave the monastery especially during the night.²³²

Clare protected not only the reputation of the sisters of S. Damiano but also the integrity of the brothers. Rejecting Innocent IV's legislation that gave the general or provincial ministers the right to permit someone to enter the monastery,²³³ Clare placed the ultimate authority of enclosure into the hands of the Holy See. Only the pope or the cardinal protector of the sisters was able to give permission for an

²²⁸ Marco Bartoli, "Francescanesimo e mondo femminile nel XIII secolo," in *Francesco il francescanesimo e la cultura della nuova Europa*, ed. Ignazio Baldelli and Angiola Maria Romanini, 167–80 (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1986).

²²⁹ *FLCI* 11:1; See also *RB* 66:1–2.

²³⁰ *FLUg* 10, 13; *FLInn* 6, 9.

²³¹ *FLCI* 11:3.

²³² *FLCI* 11:4.

²³³ *FLInn* 6.

outsider to enter the monastery.²³⁴ Even these men, however, could not enter before sunrise or remain there after sunset “unless an obvious, reasonable, and unavoidable cause demands otherwise.”²³⁵ This addition was Clare’s. Because of the poverty of the monastery and to protect its integrity, the sisters of S. Damiano were not able to host a pope, cardinal, or their retinues. There were ample places in and near Assisi for the pope or cardinal protector to stay overnight. Clare wished to be clear that for the integrity of the enclosure that the papacy was so eager to protect, the Monastery of S. Damiano was not an appropriate place to host a church prelate overnight. If a church official, however, had permission to conduct a special service for the sisters within the enclosure “either for the blessing of an abbess, the consecration of one of the sisters as a nun,²³⁶ or for any other reason,”²³⁷ Clare agreed with previous papal legislation that he was to be welcomed during the day as long as he respected the sister’s poverty. He was to “be satisfied with as few respectable companions and assistants as possible.”²³⁸ Clare omitted the directive in both Innocent’s and Ugolino’s legislation that this permission was to be given rarely.²³⁹ The giving of such permission was to be regulated on the papal end; it did not properly belong to the sisters’ *forma vitae*.

When it was necessary for workmen—seculars or Franciscan brothers—to enter the monastery, Clare edited the papal legislation down to the essential points: 1) the door should always be properly secured; and 2) the sisters were to be “extremely careful not to be seen by those entering.”²⁴⁰ Especially at these times, the sisters were to retain the integrity of their enclosure by assiduously avoiding the work area. For Clare, the integrity of the enclosure was not simply about law but about spirit. Enclosure existed to encourage union with God, and this union was not to be compromised over the entrance of a workman.

²³⁴ *FLCl* 11:7.

²³⁵ *FLCl* 11:8.

²³⁶ Concerning the consecration of nuns see Columba Hart, “*Consecratio Virginum*: Thirteenth-Century Witness,” *The American Benedictine Review* 23 (June 1972): 258–74.

²³⁷ *FLCl* 11:9.

²³⁸ *FLCl* 11:9.

²³⁹ *FLUg* 10; *FLInn* 6.

²⁴⁰ *FLCl* 11:10–12.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The final chapter of Clare's *forma vitae* concerns the relationships between S. Damiano, the Order of Friars Minor, and the church. Again, Clare edited Innocent's legislation on this topic by one-quarter and Hugolino's by more than one-half. Establishing formal relationships with these two male entities was a suffering in Clare's life and would continue to cause hardship to her sisters, eventually undermining Clare's *forma vitae* itself. In 1253, Clare was still reduced to begging from brothers who were progressively unwilling to honor Francis's promise of mutual relationship with her sisters.

While only the pope or cardinal protector could give permission for entrance into the enclosure, the visitor of S. Damiano, who was assigned by the cardinal protector of the Franciscans, was to be from the Order of Friars Minor,²⁴¹ and well-known not only for his character, but also for his integrity.²⁴² Like all who communicate within the monastery, "he should remain in a public place so that he can be seen by others."²⁴³ He could speak not only with groups of sisters, as permitted in previous papal legislation, but also with individual sisters according to what he judges, Clare adds, will promote the betterment of all.²⁴⁴ As one can see from this addition, even the papal visitation of Clare's monastery was not so much about law as about spirit. Its object was not to file a perfect report, but to help the sisters better their bond of mutual charity.

Regarding the commitment of the Franciscan brothers to her monastery, Clare could only appeal to history. By the time of Clare's death, the relationship between the brothers and sisters had been reduced to "a favor."

We have always mercifully had a chaplain from the above Order of Friars Minor, together with a clerical companion of good reputation and prudent discernment, and two lay brothers, lovers of a holy manner of

²⁴¹ *FLCI* 12:1. For an historical overview of the role of visitor in monasteries associated with Clare see Mario Sensi, "Norme per i frati minori in visita canonica e per i converse dei monasteri clariani," in *Domini Vestigia Sequi*, ed. Cæsare Vaiani, 199–221 (Assisi, Edizioni Porziuncola, 2003).

²⁴² *FLCI* 12:2.

²⁴³ *FLCI* 12:4.

²⁴⁴ *FLCI* 12:4.

living and reputable. In support of our poverty, we ask this favor from this same Order, out of consideration for the compassion of God and Blessed Francis.²⁴⁵

Clare's text offers a glimpse of how many brothers lived at the S. Damiano monastery and their roles. A chaplain served the monastery along with a clerical companion. In addition, S. Damiano housed two lay brothers who begged and supplied manual labor for the sisters.²⁴⁶ There was both a community of friars as there was a community of sisters at S. Damiano.

When the chaplain entered the monastery, he was to be seen not only by his clerical companion, as was legislated in Innocent IV's *forma vitae*,²⁴⁷ but also by other sisters.²⁴⁸ Again Clare was careful to protect the integrity of every individual within the monastery by transparency and public witness.²⁴⁹ The chaplain with his companion could enter to give communion to a sister in the infirmary who was unable to go to the parlor—Clare does not say that she was too sick to go, only that she was unable go. He could also enter for the anointing of the sick and the prayers of the dying.²⁵⁰ Since the death of a sister had a particular poignancy as well as joy for sisters who had spent their lives in loving communion with each other, death was a significant event in the S. Damiano monastery. Reflecting this, the chaplain was given the unique permission to celebrate funeral rites and solemn masses for the dead within the enclosure according to the discretion of the abbess. The other brothers were able to enter to assist in preparing the gravesite.²⁵¹

Trying not to overwhelm the brothers with responsibility, Clare reiterates that the juridical duties of the monastery belonged to the Holy See.²⁵² It was the cardinal protector who was the governor, pro-

²⁴⁵ *FLCl* 12:5–7.

²⁴⁶ *FLCl* 12:5.

²⁴⁷ *FLInn* 7.

²⁴⁸ *FLCl* 12:9.

²⁴⁹ This mutual accountability was critical to the integrity of Clare's monastery as sexual liaisons between medieval nuns and clerics/also workmen were not uncommon. On this topic see Graciela Daichman, "Misconduct in the Medieval Nunnery: Fact, Not Fiction," in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, ed. Lynda Coon, Katherine Haldane, and Elisabeth Sommer, 97–117 (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

²⁵⁰ *FLCl* 12:10.

²⁵¹ *FLCl* 12:11.

²⁵² *FLCl* 12:12.

tector, and corrector of the monastery and, since this cardinal protector was responsible both for the Franciscan brothers and sisters, he, in the end, became the effective juridical bond between them. While the brothers had temporal and pastoral duties within the monastery, the Holy See was ultimately responsible for the integrity of the sisters' *forma vitae*, "so that always subject and submissive at the feet of the holy church, steadfast in the Catholic faith, we will forever observe the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ, his Most Holy Mother, and the holy gospel that we have firmly promised."²⁵³ Clare concluded her *forma vitae* with the above line from the brother's Rule of 1223,²⁵⁴ adding "his Most Holy Mother" and the sense that the observance of this *forma vitae* should be "forever."

Clare's final word is "Amen," an ending unique to her that inserted the *forma vitae* into the liturgical rhythm of her monastic life. Her legislation was not a rule but a way of living inspired by God and discerned in mutual charity. It was a description of the relationship between God and humanity, between sisters and brothers, between charism and institution. Clare's *forma vitae* was the written experience of a lifetime, and represents the struggle to remember the poor in the following of Christ and his Most Holy Mother. It was an "Amen" to the entire Christian mystery mirrored in a community life that united the anguished depths of human poverty with the radiant sublimity of eschatological glory. It was, in the end, the mystical simplicity of the Christian life: The love of God is the love of neighbor and the cherishing of one's own soul.

²⁵³ *FLCI* 12:13.

²⁵⁴ *LR* 12:4.

PART III

CLARE: HER WRITINGS IN TRANSLATION

CLARE'S FIRST LETTER TO AGNES

¹To the venerable and most holy virgin, the Lady Agnes, daughter of the most renowned and illustrious king of Bohemia, ²Clare, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ and useless handmaid of the enclosed ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano, her subject and handmaid in all circumstances, commends herself in every way and sends, with special respect, the prayer that Agnes attain the glory of everlasting happiness.

³Hearing the account, one that brings you the highest honor, of your holy conversion and manner of life, an account that has been reputably disseminated not only to me but to nearly every region of the world, I rejoice and exalt exceedingly in the Lord. ⁴Concerning this news, I am not the only one able to rejoice, but also all those who serve and desire to serve Jesus Christ.

⁵I rejoice because you, more than others, could have enjoyed public ostentation, honors, and worldly status having had the opportunity to become, with eminent glory, legitimately married to the illustrious emperor, as would befit your and his pre-eminence. ⁶Spurning all these things with your whole heart and mind, you have chosen instead holiest poverty and physical want, ⁷accepting a nobler spouse, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will keep your virginity always immaculate and inviolate.

⁸Having loved him, you are chaste;
having touched him, you will be made more pure;
having received him, you are a virgin.

⁹His power is stronger,
his nobility higher,
his appearance lovelier,
his love sweeter,
and his every grace more elegant.

¹⁰You are now held fast in the embraces of the one
who has adorned your breast with precious stones
and has hung priceless pearls from your ears.

¹¹He has completely surrounded you
with glittering and sparkling gems,
and has placed on your head a golden crown
engraved with the seal of holiness.

¹²Therefore, dearest sister—or should I say, most venerable lady, because you are spouse, mother, and sister of my Lord Jesus Christ, ¹³and are most resplendently distinguished by the banner of inviolable virginity and holiest poverty—be strengthened in the holy service begun in you out of a burning desire for the Poor Crucified. ¹⁴For all of us, he endured the passion of the cross, rescuing us from the power of the prince of darkness—by whose power we were kept in chains because of the transgression of our first parent—and reconciling us to God the Father.

¹⁵O blessed poverty
that provides eternal riches to those who
love and embrace it!

¹⁶O holy poverty,
to those who possess and desire it,
God promises the kingdom of heaven and, of course,
gives eternal glory and a happy life!

¹⁷O pious poverty
that the Lord Jesus Christ, who ruled and is
ruling heaven and earth, and who spoke and
all things were made, deigned to embrace
before anything else!

¹⁸For foxes have dens, he says, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man, who is Christ, has nowhere to lay his head; instead, bowing his head, he handed over his spirit.

¹⁹If, then, so great as such a Lord who, coming into the virgin's womb, chose to appear contemptible, needy, and poor in this world ²⁰so that human beings, who were utterly poor and needy, suffering from an extremely grave lack of heavenly food, might be made rich in him by means of the kingdom of heaven that they will indeed possess, ²¹exalt exceedingly and rejoice, filled with great joy and spiritual happiness. ²²Because—since contempt of the world has pleased you more than its honors; poverty more than temporal riches; and storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth ²³where neither rust consumes them, nor moth destroys them, and thieves do not dig them up and steal them—your most abundant reward is in heaven, ²⁴and you have quite fittingly deserved to be called sister, spouse, and mother of the Son of the Most High Father and the glorious Virgin.

²⁵For, I am sure that you know that the kingdom of heaven is promised and given by the Lord only to the poor, because as long as something temporal is the object of love, the fruit of charity is lost. ²⁶You know, too, that one cannot serve God and material wealth, since either the one is loved and the other hated, or a person will serve one and despise the other. ²⁷You also know that a person wearing clothing cannot fight with another who is naked, because the one who has something that might be grasped is more quickly thrown to the ground. ²⁸You know, too, that it is not possible for a person to remain glorious in the world and to reign with Christ in heaven; and that a camel will be able to pass through the eye of a needle before a rich person ascends into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁹These are the reasons why you disposed of your clothing, I mean your worldly wealth, so that you might have the strength not to succumb completely to the one struggling against you, so that you may enter the kingdom of heaven by the narrow road and constricted gate.

³⁰It is indeed a great and praiseworthy exchange:
to give up the temporal for the everlasting,
to merit the heavenly rather than the earthly,
to receive a hundredfold instead of one,
to have a happy, eternal life.

³¹I thought, therefore, that I should do all I can to implore Your Excellency and Holiness with humble prayers in the innermost heart of Christ, given that you want to be strengthened in his holy service, ³²growing from good to better, from virtue to virtue, so that the one to whose service you devote yourself with every desire of your mind may deign to bestow freely upon you the rewards you have desired.

³³I also beseech you in the Lord, as best as I can, to be so kind as to include in your most holy prayers me, your servant, although useless, and the other sisters who are devoted to you who live with me in the monastery. ³⁴By the help of your prayers, may we be able to merit the mercy of Jesus Christ so that we, together with you, may deserve to enjoy the everlasting vision.

³⁵Farewell in the Lord and please pray for me.

CLARE'S SECOND LETTER TO AGNES

¹To the daughter of the King of kings, handmaid of the Lord of lords, most worthy spouse of Jesus Christ and therefore, very distinguished queen, the Lady Agnes, ²Clare, useless and unworthy handmaid of the Poor Ladies, sends her greetings and the prayer that Agnes may always live in the utmost poverty.

³I thank the one who liberally bestows grace, from whom every best and perfect gift is believed to come, because he has adorned you with such a good reputation founded upon your virtues and has made you shine with the honors of so much perfection. ⁴He did this so that once you have been made a diligent imitator of the Father who is perfect, you may deserve to be made perfect, so that his eyes may not see anything imperfect in you.

⁵This is that perfection with which the King will unite you to himself in marriage in heaven's bridal chamber where he sits in glory upon his starry throne, ⁶because despising the heights of an earthly kingdom and the less than worthy offers of an imperial marriage, ⁷you have been made an imitator of the holiest poverty, and in a spirit of great humility and the most ardent charity, you have clung to the footsteps of him with whom you have been worthy to be united in marriage.

⁸Moreover, since I know that you are laden with virtues, I shall refrain from saying too much as I do not wish to laden you with superfluous words, ⁹even though to you no word seems superfluous of those that could be the source of some consolation for you. ¹⁰But because one thing is necessary, I invoke this one thing and advise you, by the love of him to whom you have offered yourself as a holy and pleasing sacrifice, ¹¹to be mindful, like a second Rachel, of your founding purpose always seeing your beginning.

What you hold, continue to hold.

What you do, keep doing and do not stop.

¹²But with swift pace, nimble step, and feet that do not stumble so that even your walking does not raise any dust,

¹³go forward tranquilly, joyfully, briskly, and cautiously along the path of happiness,

¹⁴trusting in no one and agreeing with no one insofar as he might want to dissuade you from

pursuing your founding purpose
or might place a stumbling block in your way,
preventing you, in that perfection with which
the Spirit of the Lord has called you,
from fulfilling your vows to the Most High.

¹⁵Now concerning this, so that you may walk more tranquilly along the way of the Lord's commands, follow the advice of our venerable father, our Brother Elias, minister general. ¹⁶Prefer his advice to the advice of others and consider it more precious to you than any gift.

¹⁷Indeed, if someone tells you something else
or suggests anything to you
that may hinder your perfection
or seems contrary to your divine vocation,
even though you must respect him,
still, do not follow his advice.

¹⁸Instead, poor virgin,
embrace the Poor Christ.

¹⁹Now that you have made yourself contemptible in this world for his sake, look upon and follow the one who made himself contemptible for your sake. ²⁰Gaze upon, examine, contemplate, most noble queen, desiring to follow your spouse, who is more beautiful than the sons of humankind, and who for your salvation became the vilest of men, despised, struck, and flogged repeatedly over his entire body, dying while suffering the excruciating torments of the cross.

²¹If you suffer with him, you will reign with him,
grieving with him, you will rejoice with him,
dying with him on the cross of tribulation,
you will possess with him mansions in
heaven among the splendors of the saints,
²²and your name will be recorded in the *Book of Life* and will bring you glory among men
and women.

²³This is why you will forever in eternity share the glory of the heavenly kingdom rather than what is earthly and transitory, eternal goods instead of those that perish, and why you will live forever and ever.

²⁴Farewell, dearest sister and lady, for the sake of the Lord, your spouse; ²⁵and constantly remember me, as well as my sisters—for we rejoice in the good things of the Lord that he is accomplishing in you through his grace—in your devout prayers to the Lord. ²⁶Also, as often as possible, please remind your sisters to pray for us.

CLARE'S THIRD LETTER TO AGNES

¹To Agnes, most venerable lady and sister in Christ, deserving of love before all other mortals, blood-sister of the illustrious king of Bohemia, but now sister and spouse of the Most High King of the heavens, ²Clare, most humble and unworthy handmaid of Christ and servant of the Poor Ladies, sends her prayer for the joys of salvation in him who is the Author of Salvation and for everything better that can be desired.

³I am filled with such great joy about your well-being, your happiness, and your favorable successes through which, I understand, you are thriving on the journey you have begun to obtain the reward of heaven. ⁴And I breathe again in the Lord with elation equal to my knowledge and belief that you are supplying in wonderful ways what is lacking both in me and in the other sisters who are following in the footsteps of the poor and humble Jesus Christ.

⁵I am indeed able to rejoice, and there is no one who can separate me from such great joy, ⁶since I already possess what under heaven I have yearned for, and I see that you, supported by some kind of wonderful claim on the wisdom that comes from God's own mouth, are formidably and extraordinarily undermining the stratagems of the cunning enemy, the pride that destroys human nature, and the vanity that beguiles human hearts. ⁷I see, too, that you are embracing with humility, the virtue of faith, and the arms of poverty, the incomparable treasure that lies hidden in the field of the world and the hearts of human beings, where it is purchased by the One by whom all things were made from nothing. ⁸And, to use as my own the words of the apostle himself, I consider you someone who is God's own helper and who supports the drooping limbs of his ineffable body.

⁹Who, then, would tell me not to rejoice about such great and marvelous joys? ¹⁰That is why you, too, dearest, must always rejoice in the Lord, ¹¹and not let bitterness and confusion envelop you, O Lady most beloved in Christ, joy of the angels, and crown of your sisters. ¹²Place your mind in the mirror of eternity; place your soul in the splendor of glory; ¹³place your heart in the figure of the divine substance; and, through contemplation, transform your entire being into the image of the Divine One himself, ¹⁴so that you too may experience what his

friends experience when they taste the hidden sweetness that God alone has kept from the beginning for those who love him.

¹⁵And completely ignoring all those who in this deceitful and turbulent world ensnare their blind lovers, you might totally love him who gave himself totally out of love for you, ¹⁶whose beauty the sun and moon admire, and whose rewards, in both their preciousness and magnitude, are without end. ¹⁷I am speaking about the Son of the Most High, to whom the Virgin gave birth and, after whose birth, she remained a virgin. ¹⁸May you cling to his most sweet Mother, who gave birth to the kind of Son whom the heavens could not contain, ¹⁹and yet, she carried him in the tiny enclosure of her sacred womb, and held him on her young girl's lap.

²⁰Who would not abhor the treachery of the enemy of humanity who, by means of the pride that results from fleeting and false glories, compels that which is greater than heaven to return to nothingness? ²¹See, it is already clear that the soul of a faithful person, the most worthy of God's creations through the grace of God, is greater than heaven, ²²since the heavens and the rest of creation together cannot contain their Creator and only the soul of a faithful person is his dwelling place and throne—and this is possible only through the charity that the wicked lack. ²³For the Truth says: The one who loves me, will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and we shall come to him and make our dwelling place with him.

²⁴So, just as the glorious Virgin of virgins carried him physically, ²⁵so, you too, following in her footsteps especially those of humility and poverty, can without any doubt, always carry him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body, ²⁶containing him by whom both you and all things are contained, and possessing that which, even when compared with the other transitory possessions of this world, you will possess more securely. ²⁷Regarding this, some kings and queens of this world are deceived; ²⁸even though in their pride they have climbed all the way up to the sky, and their heads have touched the clouds, in the end they are destroyed like a pile of dung.

²⁹Now, I thought that I should respond to your charity about the things that you have asked me to clarify for you; ³⁰namely, what were the feasts—and, I imagine, that you have perhaps figured this out to some extent—that our most glorious father, Saint Francis, urged us to celebrate in a special way with different types of foods. ³¹Indeed, your prudence knows that, with the exception of the weak and the sick, for whom he advised and authorized us to use every possible discretion

with respect to any foods whatsoever, ³²none of us who are healthy and strong ought to eat anything other than Lenten fare, on both ordinary days and feast days, fasting every day ³³except on Sundays and on the Lord's Nativity, when we ought to eat twice a day. ³⁴And, on Thursdays in Ordinary Time, fasting should reflect the personal decision of each sister, so that whoever might not wish to fast would not be obligated to do so. ³⁵All the same, those of us who are healthy fast every day except Sundays and Christmas. ³⁶Certainly, during the entire Easter week, as Blessed Francis states in what he has written, and on the feasts of holy Mary and the holy apostles, we are also not obliged to fast, unless these feasts should fall on a Friday; ³⁷and, as has already been said, we who are healthy and strong always eat Lenten fare.

³⁸But because neither is our flesh the flesh of bronze, nor our strength the strength of stone, ³⁹but instead, we are frail and prone to every bodily weakness, ⁴⁰I am asking and begging in the Lord that you be restrained wisely and discreetly, dearest one, from the indiscreet and impossibly severe fasting that I know you have imposed upon yourself, ⁴¹so that living, you might profess the Lord, and might return to the Lord your reasonable worship and your sacrifice always seasoned with salt.

⁴²Stay well always in the Lord, just as I very much desire to stay well, and be sure to remember both me and my sisters in your holy prayers.

CLARE'S FOURTH LETTER TO AGNES

¹To the other half of her soul and repository of the special love of her deepest heart, illustrious queen, spouse of the Lamb of the eternal King, the Lady Agnes, her own dearest mother and, among all the others, her special daughter, ²Clare, unworthy servant of Christ and useless handmaid of his handmaids who live in the Monastery of San Damiano in Assisi, ³sends greetings and her prayer that Agnes, together with the other most holy virgins, will sing a new song before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and will follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

⁴O mother and daughter, spouse of the King of all ages, even if I have not written to you as frequently as both your soul and mine would have desired and longed for, do not for a moment wonder ⁵or in any way believe that the fire of my love for you burns any less sweetly in the deepest heart of your mother. ⁶The truth is that a shortage of messengers and the obvious perils of travel have hindered me. ⁷But now, as I write to your love, I rejoice and exult for you in the joy of the Spirit, spouse of Christ, ⁸because like that other most holy virgin, Saint Agnes, you have been in an astonishing way espoused to the immaculate Lamb, who, having assumed responsibility for all the vanities of this world, takes away the sins of the world.

⁹Happy, indeed, is the one permitted to share
in this sacred banquet so as to be joined
with all the feelings of her heart to him.

¹⁰whose beauty all the blessed hosts of the
heavens unceasingly admire,

¹¹whose affection moves,
whose contemplation invigorates,
whose generosity fills,

¹²whose sweetness replenishes,
whose remembrance pleasantly brings light,

¹³whose fragrance will revive the dead,
and whose glorious vision will bless all the citizens of the heavenly
Jerusalem,

¹⁴because the vision of him is the splendor of everlasting glory,
the radiance of everlasting light,
and a mirror without tarnish.

¹⁵Look into this mirror every day, O queen, spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually examine your face in it, ¹⁶so that in this way you may adorn yourself completely, inwardly and outwardly, clothed and covered in multicolored apparel, ¹⁷adorned in the same manner with flowers and garments made of all the virtues as is proper, dearest daughter and spouse of the Most High King. ¹⁸Moreover, in this mirror shine blessed poverty, holy humility, and charity beyond words, as you will be able, with God's grace, to contemplate throughout the entire mirror.

¹⁹Look closely, I say, to the beginning of the life of this admired one, indeed at the poverty of him who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger.

²⁰O marvelous humility!

O astonishing poverty!

²¹The King of the angels,
the Lord of heaven and earth,
is laid to rest in a manger!

²²Consider also the midst of his life, his humility, or at least his blessed poverty, the countless hardships, and the punishments that he endured for the redemption of the human race. ²³Ponder, moreover, the final days of this mirrored one, contemplate the ineffable love with which he was willing to suffer on the tree of the cross and to die there a kind of death that is more shameful than any other.

²⁴That mirror suspended upon the wood of the cross from there kept urging those passing by of what must be considered, saying: ²⁵O all you who pass by this way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering. ²⁶In response, let us with one voice and in one spirit answer him who is crying out and lamenting: "I will remember this over and over and my soul will sink within me." ²⁷Therefore, seeing this, O queen of the heavenly King, you must burn ever more strongly with the fervor of charity!

²⁸Furthermore, as you contemplate his indescribable delights, riches, and everlasting honors, ²⁹and heaving a sigh because of your heart's immeasurable desire and love you might exclaim:

³⁰Draw me after you, heavenly Spouse, we
shall run in the fragrance of your perfumes!

³¹I shall run and not grow weary until you
bring me into the wine cellar,

³²until your left hand is under my head
and your right arm blissfully embraces me;
and you kiss me with the most blissful kiss of your mouth.

³³As you are placed in this contemplation, may you remember your poor, little mother, ³⁴knowing that I have inseparably inscribed the happy memory of you on the tablets of my heart, for I regard you as dearer than all others.

³⁵What more can be said? Let my physical tongue be silent, as it is said, and let the tongue of the Spirit speak. ³⁶O blessed daughter, since my bodily tongue cannot in any way express more fully the love that I have for you, ³⁷that which I have written is certainly inadequate. I beg you to receive these words with kindness and devotion, seeing in them at least the motherly affection, by which every day I am stirred by the fire of love for you and your daughters. Please ask them to pray for me and my daughters in Christ. ³⁸Indeed, inasmuch as they are able, my own daughters, and especially the most prudent virgin, Agnes, our sister, beg you and your daughters to pray for them in the Lord.

³⁹Farewell, dearest daughter, together with your own daughters, until we meet at the throne of glory of the great God, and pray for us.

⁴⁰I must now commend to your charity, as much as possible, our dearest bearers of this letter, Brother Amato, beloved by God and human beings, and Brother Bonaugura. Amen.

CLARE'S *FORMA VITAE*

Innocent, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the beloved daughters in Christ, Abbess Clare, and the other sisters of the Monastery of San Damiano in Assisi, greetings and apostolic blessing.

The apostolic see is accustomed to approve pious desires and grant benevolent favor to the worthy requests of petitioners. Given this, there has humbly come forth from you to us a petition that we take steps to confirm by apostolic authority the form of life given to you by Blessed Francis and freely accepted by you. In conformity with this form of life, you are to live together in unity of spirit and in the profession of the highest poverty. Our venerable brother, the bishop of Ostia and Velletri, found it fit for approval as is more fully documented in a letter written at this time by this same bishop.

Attentive, therefore, to your devoted requests, we confirm by apostolic authority and support by our patronage of this present document what this bishop has ratified and favored in this matter. The wording of his letter present before us is inserted verbatim and reads as follows:

Rainaldo, by divine mercy bishop of Ostia and Velletri, to his most dear mother and daughter in Christ, Lady Clare, abbess of San Damiano in Assisi, and her sisters both present and to come, greetings and paternal blessing.

Because you, beloved daughters in Christ, have despised the pomp and pleasures of the world, and follow in the footsteps of Christ himself and his Most Holy Mother, having chosen to live bodily enclosed and to serve the Lord in most high poverty so that with spiritual freedom you are able to be of service to the Lord, commending your holy proposal in the Lord, we freely will to impart the benevolent favor of paternal affection on your vows and holy desires. For this reason, inclined by your pious prayers, we confirm for all time, for all of you and for all who will succeed you in your monastery, by the authority of the Lord Pope as well as our own, the form of life and way of holy unity and most high poverty that your blessed father, Saint Francis, handed over to you in word and writing to observe.

We ratify by our patronage this document that is before us. It reads as follows:

Chapter 1

In the name of the Lord begins the form of life of the Poor Sisters.

¹The form of life of the Order of Poor Sisters founded by Blessed Francis is this: ²to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without property, and in chastity.

³Clare, unworthy handmaid of Christ and little plant of the most blessed father, Francis, promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent, his canonically elected successors, and the Roman church. ⁴Just as at the beginning of her conversion, she, together with her sisters, promised obedience to Blessed Francis, so now, she promises his successors to observe inviolably this same obedience. ⁵And the other sisters shall always be obligated to obey the successor of Blessed Francis, Sister Clare, and the other canonically elected abbesses who succeed her.

Chapter 2

¹If, by divine inspiration, a woman comes to us wanting to accept this life, the abbess must seek the consent of all the sisters. ²If the majority agrees, after having obtained the permission of our Lord Cardinal Protector, she may receive her. ³Upon deciding to receive her, the abbess either carefully examines her herself, or has her examined concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the church. ⁴And if she believes all these things and wants to profess them faithfully and observe them steadfastly until the end, ⁵if she has no husband or if her husband has already entered religious life with the authority of the diocesan bishop and has already made a vow of continence, and if there is no impediment to the observance of this life such as advanced age, illness, or mental instability, ⁶let the manner of our life be carefully explained to her.

⁷If she is suitable, the word of the holy gospel is to be explained to her: that she should go and sell everything she has and make certain that the money is distributed to the poor. ⁸If, however, she is unable to do this, her good will suffices.

⁹The abbess and her sisters are not to concern themselves with her temporal affairs, so that she is free to distribute her goods as the Lord inspires. ¹⁰However, if counsel is required, let them send her to discerning and God-fearing men, according to whose prudent advice her goods might be distributed to the poor. ¹¹Then, after her hair is tonsured and her secular clothes set aside, she may be given three tunics

and a mantle. ¹²Thereafter, she is not permitted to leave the monastery without a useful, reasonable, obvious, and approved purpose. ¹³At the end of her novitiate year, she may be received into obedience promising to observe perpetually the life and form of our poverty.

¹⁴No one is to receive the veil during the time of novitiate. ¹⁵For convenience and propriety in serving and working, the sisters may have small mantles. ¹⁶As she deems advisable by necessity, the abbess prudently provides clothing for them according to individual needs, locations, seasons, and cold climates.

¹⁷Young girls received into the monastery before the legal age are tonsured, and setting aside their secular clothes, they are clothed in a religious dress as the abbess sees fit. ¹⁸When they reach the legal age, they may make their profession clothed as the other sisters. ¹⁹For these girls and the other novices, the abbess shall solicitously provide a teacher from the more prudent sisters of the entire monastery. ²⁰This teacher shall diligently educate them in a holy manner of life and virtuous character according to the form of our profession.

²¹Let the process described above also be observed in the examination and reception of sisters serving outside the monastery. ²²These sisters may wear shoes. ²³No other woman may live with us in the monastery unless she has been received according to the form of our profession. ²⁴And out of love for the most holy and beloved baby boy wrapped in poor rags and laid in a manger, and for the love of his Most Holy Mother, I admonish, beg, and exhort my sisters always to wear clothing of little worth.

Chapter 3

¹The sisters, who can read, say the Divine Office according to the custom of the Friars Minor. ²They are able to have breviaries for this, reading them without singing. ³Those, who for good reason are at times unable to recite their hours are permitted, just as the other sisters, to say the Our Fathers.

⁴The sisters who do not read are to say twenty-four Our Fathers for Matins, five for Lauds, seven for each of the hours of Prime, Terce, Sext, and None, twelve for Vespers, and seven for Compline. ⁵Let them also say seven Our Fathers at Vespers for the dead with the *Requiem aeternam* and twelve for Matins—⁶whereas the sisters who read are to recite the Office of the Dead. ⁷However, when a sister of our monastery passes, the sisters are to say fifty Our Fathers.

⁸The sisters are to fast at all times. ⁹However, on Christmas, no matter on what day it falls, they may eat twice. ¹⁰The young, frail, and those serving outside the monastery may be mercifully dispensed as the abbess sees fit. ¹¹During a time of obvious need, however, the sisters are not obligated to bodily fasting.

¹²The sisters, with the permission of the abbess, may confess at least twelve times a year. ¹³During confession, they should refrain from inserting conversation that does not pertain to confession and the salvation of souls. ¹⁴They may receive communion seven times during the year namely on Christmas day, Holy Thursday, Easter, Pentecost, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the Feast of Saint Francis, and the Feast of All Saints. ¹⁵The chaplain is permitted to enter the enclosure to celebrate the reception of the Eucharist with the healthy or the infirmed sisters.

Chapter 4

¹In the election of the abbess, the sisters are bound to observe the canonical form. ²They are to arrange quickly to have the minister general or the provincial of the Order of Friars Minor present. ³He is to dispose them through the Word of God to perfect harmony and the common good in the choice they are to make. ⁴No woman is to be elected unless she is professed. ⁵And if a non-professed is elected or given to them in another way, she is not to be obeyed unless she first professes the form of our poverty.

⁶At her death, the election of another abbess is to take place. ⁷If it is evident at any time to the entire body of sisters that she is not capable for service and their common good, the sisters are bound, according to the process mentioned above, to elect for themselves another as abbess and mother as soon as possible.

⁸Let the one elected reflect upon the kind of burden she has undertaken and to whom she must render an account of the flock entrusted to her. ⁹She is to be eager to lead the others more by virtue and holy manner of living than by her office, so that inspired by her example, the sisters might obey her more out of love than out of fear. ¹⁰She should show no partiality, for if she favors some, she will cause scandal among all. ¹¹Let her console the afflicted. ¹²She is to be the last refuge for the afflicted, for if, while under her care remedies are lacking, despair will overtake the sick. ¹³Let her keep the common life in all things especially in the church, dormitory, refectory, infirmary, and by her clothing. ¹⁴Her vicaress is bound to do likewise.

¹⁵At least once a week, the abbess is to call her sisters together for chapter. ¹⁶There both she and the sisters are to confess humbly their common and public offenses and negligences. ¹⁷There, too, she confers with all of her sisters concerning those things that need to be discussed for the benefit and integrity of the monastery—¹⁸for the Lord often reveals what is better to the least.

¹⁹No large debt may be incurred except with the common consent of the sisters and evident necessity, and this is to be done through a procurator. ²⁰In addition, the abbess and her sisters are to be careful that nothing is deposited in the monastery for safekeeping, ²¹because this practice often stirs up disturbances and scandals.

²²To preserve the unity of mutual love and peace, all who hold offices in the monastery are chosen by the common consent of all the sisters. ²³In the same way, at least eight sisters from the more discerning are elected whose advice the abbess must always use in those matters that the form of our life requires. ²⁴If it seems useful and expedient to them, the sisters can and must at times remove those in office and the discreets and elect others in their place.

Chapter 5

¹From the hour of Compline until Terce, the sisters are to remain silent with the exception of those serving outside the monastery. ²They are always to remain silent in the church, dormitory, and while they are eating in the refectory. ³In the infirmary, however, they may speak with discernment at any time they see fit for the recreation and service of the sick. ⁴They may, however, always and everywhere speak briefly in a quiet voice what is necessary to convey.

⁵The sisters may not speak in the parlor or at the grill without the permission of the abbess or her vicaress. ⁶Those with permission should not dare speak in the parlor unless they are in the presence and hearing of two sisters. ⁷They certainly should not presume to approach the grill unless there are at least three sisters present who were appointed by the abbess or her vicaress from the eight discreets elected by all the sisters for the counsel of the abbess. ⁸The abbess and her vicaress are also bound to observe this way of speaking—⁹and this occurs rarely at the grill and never at the door.

¹⁰A cloth is hung on the inside of the grill. It should not be removed except when the Word of God is proclaimed or when a sister is speaking to someone. ¹¹The grill should have a wooden door with two different iron locks, thoroughly secured by bars and bolts, ¹²so that, especially at

night, it is locked with two keys—the abbess has one, the sacristan has the other. ¹³It is always to remain locked except when someone attends the Divine Office or for reasons mentioned above.

¹⁴Under no circumstances whatever may a sister speak to anyone at the grill before sunrise or after sunset. ¹⁵A cloth, which is never moved aside, must always remain inside the parlor. ¹⁶No sister may speak in the parlor during the Lent of Saint Martin and the Lent before Easter ¹⁷except to a priest for confession or for another obvious necessity—left to the discretion of the abbess or her vicaress.

Chapter 6

¹After the Most High Father of the heavens saw fit by his grace to enlighten my heart to do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed father, Saint Francis, shortly after his own conversion, I, together with my sisters, willingly promised him obedience. ²When the blessed father saw that we did not fear poverty, labor, trial, disregard, and the contempt of the world, but instead regarded such things as great delights, moved by compassion, he wrote a form of life for us as follows:

³Because by divine inspiration, you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the Most High King, the Father of the heavens, and have espoused yourselves to the Holy Spirit, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy gospel, ⁴I resolve and promise for myself and my brothers always to have the same attentive care and special solicitude for you as for them.

⁵As long as he lived, he diligently fulfilled this promise, and wanted his brothers always to do the same. ⁶And so that we and also those coming after us would never turn away from the most holy poverty that we have acquired, he wrote again shortly before his death his last will for us, saying:

⁷I, little brother Francis, want to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and of his Most Holy Mother and to persevere in this until the end. ⁸And I beg and counsel you, my ladies, always to live in this most holy life and poverty. ⁹Guard yourselves carefully that you never, in any respect whatsoever, turn away from this because of the teaching or advice of anyone.

¹⁰Just as I, together with my sisters, have always been solicitous to safeguard the holy poverty that we promised to the Lord God and Blessed

Francis, ¹¹so also, the abbesses who succeed me in office and all the sisters are bound to observe it inviolably until the end. ¹²This means that they are not to receive or acquire possessions or property by themselves or through an intermediary. ¹³Nor are they to have anything else that could reasonably be called property, ¹⁴except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and seclusion of the monastery. ¹⁵This land should not be cultivated, however, except for a garden for their needs.

Chapter 7

¹After the hour of Terce, the sisters to whom the Lord has given the grace to work, work faithfully and devotedly at tasks that pertain to the integrity and service of the community ²so that banishing idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion whom all things of time ought to serve devotedly.

³During chapter, the abbess or her vicaress must assign in the presence of all the manual labor that is to be done. ⁴The same occurs if some alms are sent for the needs of the sisters, so that they can remember their benefactors in prayer together. ⁵All alms are to be distributed for the benefit of the community by the abbess or her vicaress with the counsel of the discreet.

Chapter 8

¹The sisters are to appropriate nothing to themselves, neither house, place, nor anything at all. ²Instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them confidently send for alms. ³Nor should they feel ashamed, because the Lord himself became poor for us in this world.

⁴This is the sublime height of most high poverty—that he made you, my dearest sisters, heiresses and queens of the Heavenly King, poor in all things, but exalted in the virtues. ⁵Let this be your portion that leads into the land of the living. ⁶Clinging totally to this, dearest sisters, for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Most Holy Mother, never desire to have anything else under heaven.

⁷No sister is permitted to send letters, or to receive something or give something away outside of the monastery without the permission of the abbess. ⁸Neither is it permissible to have anything that the abbess did not give or permit. ⁹But if something is sent to a sister by

her relatives or others, the abbess may allow it to be given to her. ¹⁰If she needs it, the sister can use it; otherwise, let her lovingly give it to a sister who needs it. ¹¹On the other hand, if some money is sent to her, the abbess with the counsel of the discreets may provide for her needs.

¹²The abbess, both personally and through other sisters, is obliged to inquire solicitously about the infirmed sisters. ¹³According to the resources of the place, she is to provide charitably and mercifully as their illnesses require whether that be medical attention, special foods, or any other necessities ¹⁴because all are bound to serve and provide for their sick sisters just as they would want to be served themselves if they were in the grip of some infirmity. ¹⁵Let each sister confidently make her need known to the other. ¹⁶For if a mother loves and nourishes her biological daughter, how much more diligently should a sister love and nourish her spiritual sister.

¹⁷The sisters who are ill may lie on sacks filled with straw and have feather pillows for their head. ¹⁸Those needing woolen slippers and quilts may use them. ¹⁹When the sick sisters have visitors from outside the monastery, each sister may respond briefly with some good words to those speaking to them. ²⁰But the other sisters who have permission may not dare to speak to those entering the monastery unless in the presence and hearing of the two sister discreets assigned by the abbess or her vicaress. ²¹The abbess herself and her vicaress must observe this same form of speaking.

Chapter 9

¹If a sister, through the prompting of the enemy, seriously sins against the form of our profession, she is to be admonished two or three times by the abbess or other sisters. ²If she does not amend her ways, let her eat bread and water on the floor in the refectory in the presence of all the sisters for as many days as she remains obstinate. ³And if it seems advisable to the abbess, she may be subjected to more serious punishment. ⁴Meanwhile, as long as she remains obstinate, let her pray that the Lord will enlighten her heart to do penance. ⁵The abbess and her sisters, however, must be careful not to become angry or disturbed because of another's sin, for anger and agitation prevent charity in oneself and others.

⁶If, may this never happen, because of a word or gesture an occasion of trouble or scandal arises between one sister and another, ⁷let she who started the trouble, before offering the gift of her prayer in the

presence of the Lord, not only immediately prostrate herself humbly at the feet of the other begging pardon, ⁸but also beg her with true simplicity to intercede for her to the Lord that he might forgive her. ⁹She, then, remembering that word of the Lord: "If you do not forgive from the heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you," ¹⁰generously forgives her sister every wrong she has done her.

¹¹The sisters serving outside of the monastery may not delay long, unless an obvious reason demands this. ¹²They ought to go about honorably and speak little so that those seeing them are always edified. ¹³Let them zealously avoid having suspicious meetings or dealings with others. ¹⁴They may not be godmothers of men or women so that an occasion for gossip or trouble does not arise because of this. ¹⁵They should not presume to repeat the gossip of the world inside the monastery, ¹⁶and they are strictly bound not to repeat outside the monastery anything that was said or done within that could cause scandal of any kind.

¹⁷However, if any sister guilelessly offends in these two matters, let it be left to the prudence of the abbess to impose with mercy a penance on her. ¹⁸But if she does this because of a bad habit, the abbess with the counsel of the discreets may impose a penance on her according to the nature of the fault.

Chapter 10

¹Let the abbess instruct and visit her sisters, and humbly and charitably correct them, not advising them to do anything that is against their soul and the form of our profession. ²The sisters under her are to remember that for God's sake they have renounced their own wills. ³They are, therefore, strictly obliged to obey their abbess in those things they promised the Lord to observe that are not contrary to the soul and our profession.

⁴On her part, let the abbess be so familiar with them that they can speak and act with her as ladies to their servant. ⁵For, since the abbess is the servant of all the sisters, that is how it should be.

⁶I strongly admonish and exhort the sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ to guard against all pride, vainglory, envy, greed, worldly care and anxiety, detraction and murmuring, dissension and division. ⁷Let them be eager always to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love that is the bond of perfection.

⁸Let those who cannot read not be anxious to learn. ⁹Rather, let them study what they ought to desire above all else, the Spirit of the Lord

and his holy work, ¹⁰to pray always to him with a pure heart, to have humility, patience in difficulty and sickness, ¹¹and to love those who persecute, blame, and accuse us, ¹²for the Lord says: "Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, the kingdom of heaven is theirs." ¹³And, "Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved."

Chapter 11

¹Let the portress be of a mature character, discerning, and of a suitable age. During the day, she is to stay near the door in an open cell without a door. ²Let a suitable companion be assigned to her who is to take her place in everything whenever necessary.

³The door must be thoroughly secured with two different iron locks, bars, and bolts, ⁴so that, particularly at night, it is locked with two keys—the portress has one, the abbess has the other. ⁵During the day, it should never be left unguarded and is securely locked with one key. ⁶Let them diligently see to it that the door is never left open except for as little as possible when it is fitting. ⁷It is never to be opened to someone who wants to enter unless he has been given permission by the Supreme Pontiff or our Lord Cardinal.

⁸The sisters may not permit anyone to enter the monastery before sunrise or to remain inside after sunset unless an obvious, reasonable, and unavoidable cause demands otherwise. ⁹If a bishop has permission to celebrate Mass within the enclosure either for the blessing of an abbess, the consecration of one of the sisters as a nun, or for any other reason, let him be satisfied with as few respectable companions and assistants as possible.

¹⁰Whenever it is necessary for other men to enter the monastery to do some work, the abbess is carefully to post a suitable person at the door ¹¹who may open it to those assigned to the work and to no others. ¹²At such times, let all the sisters be extremely careful not to be seen by those entering.

Chapter 12

¹Our visitor should always be from the Order of Friars Minor according to the will and mandate of our cardinal. ²He is to be the kind of friar well-known for his integrity and character. ³His duty shall be to correct in the leadership, as well as in the members, transgressions

committed against the form of our profession. ⁴He should remain in a public place so that he can be seen by others. He is permitted to speak with groups and with individuals about matters that pertain to the duty of visitation according to what he judges will promote the betterment of all.

⁵We have always mercifully had a chaplain from the above Order of Friars Minor, together with a clerical companion of good reputation and prudent discernment, and two lay brothers, lovers of a holy manner of living and reputable. ⁶In support of our poverty, we ask this favor from this same Order, ⁷out of consideration for the compassion of God and Blessed Francis.

⁸The chaplain is not permitted to enter the monastery without a companion. ⁹When inside, let them be in a public place, so that they can be always seen by each other and by others. ¹⁰They may enter for the confession of the sick sisters, who cannot go to the parlor for their communion, the anointing of the sick, and the prayers of the dying. ¹¹According to the discretion of the abbess, sufficient and suitable persons can enter for funeral rites, solemn Masses for the dead, and for digging, opening, or making arrangements for the grave.

¹²Finally, the sisters are always strictly bound to have that cardinal of the holy Roman church who has been delegated to the Friars Minor by the Lord Pope for our governor, protector, and corrector ¹³so that always subject and submissive at the feet of the holy church, steadfast in the Catholic faith, we will forever observe the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ, his Most Holy Mother, and the holy gospel that we have firmly promised.

Given in Perugia, the sixteenth day of September, during the tenth year of the pontificate of our Lord Pope Innocent IV. Therefore, no one is permitted to destroy this document of our confirmation or dare to oppose it heedlessly. If anyone, however, presumes to attempt this, let him know that he will incur the wrath of the Almighty God and his blessed apostles Peter and Paul.

Given in Assisi, the ninth day of August, in the eleventh year of our pontificate.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



1. Tavola of Clare (Courtesy of Tau-AV Produktion, photo by Bruno Föh). A thirteenth-century iconic altarpiece depicting eight scenes from the life of Clare.



2. Scene from the Tavola of Clare (Courtesy of Tau-AV Produktion, photo by Bruno Fäh).

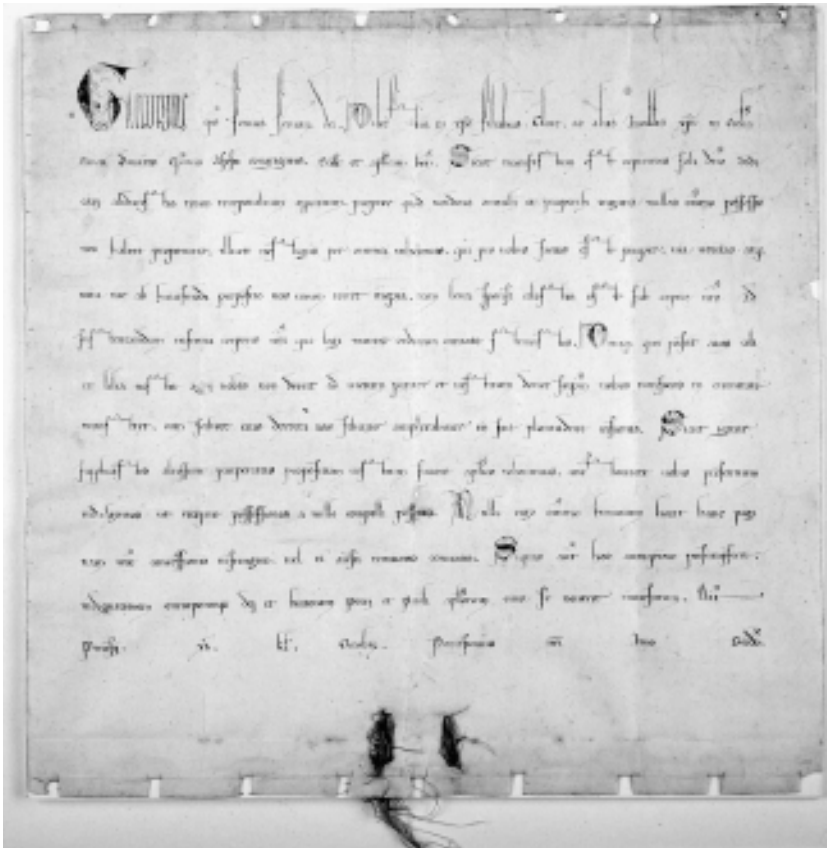
This scene depicts Catherine joining Clare at S. Angelo di Panzo.



3. S. Damiano in Assisi—the front of the monastery (Courtesy of Daren Zehnle)
This church repaired by Francis became the monastery of Clare and her sisters.



4. S. Damiano in Assisi—the garden (Courtesy of Daren Zehnle)



5. The Privilege of Poverty (Courtesy of the Protomonastery of S. Chiara in Assisi, Italy).

The official 1228 letter from Gregory IX giving the S. Damiano sisters the privilege not to be forced to own property.



6. Agnes of Prague in Wenceslas Square (Photo by Joan Mueller)
This image of Agnes of Prague is sculpted among Prague's patron saints in Wenceslas Square, the site of the November, 1989, Velvet Revolution, that led to the collapse of the communist regime.



7. Agnes of Prague and Agnes of Assisi (Courtesy of Národní knihovna České republiky in Prague)

Miniature of Agnes of Prague (circa 1270; Osek Lectionary, fol. 160r) addressing her namesake, the virgin martyr, Agnes of Rome, who is holding the palm of martyrdom.



8. Agnes of Prague's Funerary Monument (Photo by Joan Mueller)

Agnes's limestone funerary monument located in the south wall of the Chapel of the Virgin Mary—one of a network of churches and chapels incorporated into Agnes's monastery in Prague. The nuns, concerned with the periodic flooding of the monastery and wishing to protect Agnes's remains, exhumed her body and placed it in a wooden coffin. Unfortunately, these remains were lost in the 1420 Hussite revolution.